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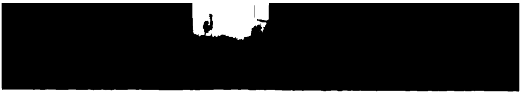

MINERVA'S MANEUVRES

The balloon, Minerva, a shriek and a shout.

—*Page 402.*

Minerva's Manoeuvres

The Cheerful Facts of a "Return to Nature"

By
CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS
Author of "Cheerful Americans,"
Etc.

Illustrated by Frederic R. Gruger

New York
A. S. Barnes & Company
1905

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Published August, 1905

To

J. B.

PREFACE.

When a play makes a tremendous hit the author is called before the curtain and after bowing and allowing his heart (and his head) to swell more and more, he generously points to the actors and actresses who are grouped around him as much as to say, "They did it."

And then the audience goes wild at such unselfishness and cries of "Speech, speech!" rend the air and the author has arrived at the happiest moment of his life. He feels that all creation was evolved just for this supreme moment and his knees shake and (in a voice surcharged with emotion) he says things that do not read well in print, but which rouse the house to greater enthusiasm, and he wishes that William Shakespeare could have lived to see this night, and goes home to dream happy dreams.

Sometimes he can't contain his speech any longer than the end of the third act, and with comparatively little applause, and, it may be, only one solitary call of "Author" (from his devoted brother in the front row) he rushes to the footlights and delivers himself of his pent up eloquence. And then perhaps the critics jump on the piece and kill it, and the next day he wishes he hadn't spoken.

But no dramatic author would think of going out before the gray asbestos curtain had been raised on the overture to say to the cold, sternly critical audience that this was the proudest moment of his life and that he hoped the actors would see their duty and do it. That would be considered assurance.

And yet we writers of—novels—do rush on before the first chapter has been reached and sometimes we tell how it is going to end and sometimes we give the names of the authorities from whom we lifted our central idea, and sometimes we strike an attitude of timid uncertainty and bespeak the indulgence of the reader—but always without response of any kind.

Not a hand, not a cry of "Author": nothing but the gray asbestos curtain of silence.

Of course there are cases when a book runs into the "six best selling class" and people get into the habit of buying it and the habit is not broken for weeks and weeks; and then, after the twentieth edition is exhausted the author comes out with a "Preface to the twenty-first edition," and as he smells the fragrance of the bouquets that the critics have handsomely handed out and hears the plaudits of those who have thronged to read him he says brokenly, "I thank you. You have raised me from a point where I was living on my brother in the front row to a position where I can take my pick of motor cars" (Not automobiles, mind you), "and while I never thought of money while I was writing the book, now I both think and have a good deal of it. Thank you! Thank you!"

But I, (rather than not come out at all) am going to squeeze before the gray asbestos and say "Thank you. Critics, readers; gentle and otherwise, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

"If there is anything good in this book, believe me it is the characters who are responsible for it.

"And let me take this occasion to say that the book would never have been written if I had not been encouraged by one who has the faculty of making a man do his best. She is here to-night, but I am not permitted to mention her.

"I have had great fun writing 'Minerva's Manœuvres,' and this is really the proudest moment of my life. (Cheers.) My heroine, Minerva, is a good girl and I can give her a fine character if she should ever seek a place—in your hearts.

"Thank you! Thank you!"

(Curtain goes up.) C. B. L.

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CHAPTER I.

A COERCED COOK.

AT the last minute we learned that the girl we had counted upon to do our cooking at Clover Lodge had scarlet fever, and as she was the only local girl that we could hire—New England girls preferring to work in a "shop" to domestic service —we were at our wits' end.

In our extremity Mrs. Vernon (my wife) made a last appeal to Minerva. She went into the kitchen of our New York flat and said,

"Minerva, Mamie Logan, the girl we expected to have up at Clover Lodge, has scarlet fever."

Minerva was blacking the stove (as I could see from the dining room), but she stopped and turned around as she always did when her mistress spoke to her, and said "Yas'm."

"Well, do you know what that means, Minerva?"

"Means she's sick, ma'am."

"Yes, but it also means that I haven't anybody to cook for me up there."

"Yas'm."

"Well, don't you think you could go up if we gave you five dollars a month more than you're getting now?"

Minerva rubbed her already black arm with the blacking brush in an absent minded sort of way as she said,

" 'Deed I hate the country. It's so dismal."

I would have given up trying to get her to come then, as her tone sounded final to me, but Mrs. Vernon caught a gleam of willingness in her expression, and she said,

"Some country places may be doleful, Minerva, but Clover Lodge is in one of the most beautiful places in the world, and there's a light kitchen and you can take 'Miss Pussy,' you know. I'm sure you'll like it and the work won't be as hard as it is here and there's lots of fresh air. And I'll lend you books to read. If you won't come we'll have to give up going, as I won't take a stranger *up* from the city."

"Yas'm," said Minerva, turning to the stove and beginning to use the brush again.

"Well, will you go, Minerva?"

"Yas'm."

"Oh, you dear good thing," said my wife, and I fully expected her to hug Minerva.

She came in to where I was finishing my second cup of coffee and said,

"Minerva is a jewel. She's going up. Do you know, in some ways it's better than if we had Mamie Logan because Minerva is a much better cook and she won't have any beaux from the village to make a noise in the kitchen in the evening—"

"No, but you may have to import beaux from Thompson Street to solace her loneliness," said I. "If I know the kind at all, Minerva will die one day away from New York."

"Nonsense," said Ethel. "She can't help falling in love with the view from the kitchen windows. That lovely old purple Mount Nebo."

I had my doubts of a New York born and bred colored cook falling in love with any view that did not comprehend a row of city houses somewhere in its composition, but I said nothing. The doctor had told me that Ethel absolutely needed a long rest in the "real country," hill country preferred, and even if I had to go out and help Minerva in the kitchen I was going up.

We had spent a delightful week at Clover Lodge the year before with the Chauncey Wheelocks, but this year they were going to Europe and had proposed our renting it furnished and had promised Mamie Logan as cook. But a *cordon bleu* is not immune from scarlet fever, as we had found to our vexation—although I doubt if we felt it as much as Mamie did. She, by the way, had actually liked scenery and had told Mrs. Vernon that the distant old mountain peak was company for her while she was washing dishes. But a purple peak would not take the place of the yellow lights of a great city to Minerva and I looked forward to varied experiences, although I said nothing about my expectations to Ethel.

I half expected Minerva to back out when it came to going, but she did not. Possibly *the excitem*ent of going on the cars had something to do with her fortitude. Possibly the diversion that "Miss Pussy" afforded made her forget that she was leaving her beloved city.

The cat was a startler and no mistake. While the train was in motion she kept quiet, but whenever we stopped at a station she let forth ear splitting shrieks, acting exactly as if she were being tortured. More than one non-smoking man sought refuge in the smoker and many were the black looks cast at Minerva.

I was glad that she sat behind us, for I did not wish to be mixed up in the affair. As for her she shrieked with laughter every time that the cat shrieked with dismay, and I felt that the cat, though unpleasant, was really making our journey easier, as it kept Minerva from dwelling upon her exile.

We took a branch road at Springfield and a half hour later we were in a wagon, climbing the steep ascent that leads to Clover Lodge.

The cat, sniffing fresh air and longing to be at liberty, redoubled its howls, but Minerva no longer laughed. She looked at the distant hills in an awed sort of way and sighed.

I sat with the driver, and Mrs. Vernon told Minerva interesting bits about the locality through which we were passing, but a languid "Yas'm" was the only reply she vouchsafed. She was fast falling a prey to nostalgia.

Upon our arrival at Clover Lodge there was enough to do to keep every one busy. The frantic cat was set free as soon as we arrived and she scudded under the house and we saw no more of her for some time. I did not think much of it at the moment, but when after our somewhat picnic dinner I heard Minerva at the back of the house calling in heart breaking tones "Miss Pussy, Miss Pussy, woan' you come out? Come ou—t," I realized that I should have chained the cat in the kitchen. It might stay away for a day or two in order to express its contempt for people who could subject it to such humiliation.

I was enjoying a smoke and Ethel was lying down. Oh, what a blessed relief this was from the noise and odours and bustle of the city!

"I can't get out. Mist. Vernon! Mist. Vernon! I can't get out. Ow."

The sounds seemed to come from under the kitchen. I side-tracked my peaceful thoughts, laid my cigar on the railing of the piazza and ran around to the kitchen door and beheld Minerva wedged fast under the house. Clover Lodge has a very diminutive cellar which does not extend as far as the kitchen. There is a space of some two feet between the kitchen floor and the ground, used as a receptacle for various odds and ends in the way of boxes, clothes poles and the like, and our stout Minerva had attempted to creep under there in order to get Miss Pussy, whose tell-tale eyes gleamed at her from the darkness. She had failed to take into account the fact that her head could go where her body could not follow and she had become stuck.

"It's all right, Minerva. I'll get you out. There's very little room for promenading there. I'll have to knock a board out. I'll get an axe."

She kept up her groaning and at last Ethel was aroused by it, and, somewhat alarmed, hurried into the kitchen and saw the sprawling figure of Minerva with Clover Lodge on her back. The spectacle appealed to her sense of humour and she retreated to where she could laugh.

I had a somewhat ticklish job to get Minerva out unhurt. It was awkward splitting the board without touching her, but I compassed it at last, although each stroke of the axe was followed by a groan from Minerva, a spit from the cat and a suppressed laugh from Ethel, who was viewing the proceedings from a little distance.

When the board fell away and had been removed, Minerva, like an alligator, crawled in a little farther, so as to turn around, and then she crawled out face foremost, leaving Miss Pussy saying most ungenerous things there in the dusk.

"The cat will come out in a while, Minerva," said I. "Are you hurt?"

Minerva was sitting on the ground, listening intently.

"*What's* dem noises?" said she; "Oh, dis ain' no place for me. Heah dem moanin's in de grass."

"Dem moanin's in de grass" were bull frogs in a little pond not far away, but I dare say she pictured the meadows as full of people who had been enticed from the city and were now expiring under the evening sky, far from their friends.

I explained what the noise was and she returned to the kitchen, while I resumed consumption of my cigar and Ethel returned to her room, but in a few minutes:

"Mis. Vernon. Mis. Vernon. Ain't there no more lights?"

Ethel had dropped asleep, so I went out into the kitchen. Minerva had lighted two lamps, and to me the kitchen looked like a ball room, it was so light, but the dusky maid from the Metropolis was seeing New York in her mind's eye, and two kerosene lamps did not take the place of the firmament of gas and electric lights to which she had been used all her life.

"It is the first night and I will humour her," thought I, and so I brought out a lamp from the parlour and another from the sitting room. I had the light from my cigar and needed no other.

When all four lamps had united to cast their radiance upon the kitchen Minerva was satisfied and thanked me in a die-a-way tone that, being interpreted, meant "Give me back New York with its crowds, and its noise and its glitter and its entertaining 'gentlemen' and its ice cream and soda." Poor Minerva! Our joy and happiness came from the very things that were the abomination of desolation to her.

Meanwhile Ethel awoke from her nap and came down stairs. "Mercy, how dark it is. Why didn't you light a lamp? Where are you, Philip?"

"I'm out on the piazza. Come out?"

"No, dear, I want to finish that story of Mrs. Everard Cotes'. I'm fascinated with it."

"Ethel, come here," said I, in a tone full of meaning.

She felt her way out.

"Minerva needed the gleam of many lights in the kitchen and I've plucked a lamp from every room. You'll tire your eyes reading. Come and sit with me."

Ethel gave a little chuckle and sat down in the chair I provided.

"Dear, it will end by our becoming her slaves."

"Anything to keep her," said I. "Who wants a light but the great light of stars. I suppose that to-night on all this broad continent there is no soul so wretched as poor Minerva, deprived of her elevator man and the girl across the hall—and all, that we may live in comfort. Who are we, Ethel, that we should do this thing?"

"Oh, stop your nonsense. Minerva will be all right when the sun shines."

The light from the kitchen window shone away down the hill and lighted up the pool in which the bull frogs were "moaning." Above their chorus we heard a wail.

"What's that, an owl?"

"No, Ethel, that's a howl. It's Minerva again."

We could now distinguish "So dismal!"

"You go and hold her in your lap and rock her to sleep. I can't," said I.

Ethel sighed herself. It was becoming monotonous. She rose and went into the kitchen, feeling her way cautiously through the dark sitting room, yet stumbling over a foot stool.

It looked to me as if we would be forced to take turns sitting outside of Minerva's bed-room door, guarding her against the horrors of a country night, but after a time Ethel returned to me and told me that "Miss Pussy" had come in for dinner and that Minerva was perfectly happy and was going to take her to bed with her.

Soon after that she retired, and, being tired out with the labours and tribulations of the day, she slept like a log all night, and we were enabled to enjoy our repose undisturbed.

I rose early next morning and sang gaily, and I sang with a purpose. It might disturb Mrs. Vernon's last nap, but it could not fail to make Minerva realize that she was not alone in the country, whereas if she had risen first and had seen nothing in the world but the great silent mountain she might have fled incontinently to the city.

When she came down to the kitchen, carrying the cat in her arms, I had already started the fire.

"Good morning, Minerva," said I. "I haven't built a kitchen fire since I was a small boy, and I wanted to see if I could do it. Excellent draught. Did you sleep well?"

"Yas'r."

The laconic answer was in itself a symptom that she felt better.

"And the cat came back?" said I.

"Yas'r."

I left the kitchen and took a walk in the cool morning air. All was well with the world. Minerva had slept and had learned that a night in the country was not fatal and Miss Pussy had recovered her equanimity. I sought for an appetite in the pine woods, and I found one.

CHAPTER II.

MINERVA STUDIES NATURE.

I BLESSED Heaven for the lovely day that had come to us. If it had been rainy or even gray we should have had a hard time to keep Minerva. But even a hidebound cockney like herself could tolerate the sweetness of the air and the softness of the clouds and the brightness of the sun.

Ethel made cake so that she could be in the kitchen. I did not exactly approve of it, because the day was meant to be spent in the open, and I wanted to swing hammocks out in the pine woods and read a new novel which had been recommended to me as excellent for reading aloud, but I well knew the wisdom of getting Minerva started right, and I dare say that Ethel's amiable conversation made her forget that the cook on the "other side of the hall" was nearly two hundred miles away.

At lunch time, Ethel looked very much heated and worn, and I said to myself, “Better me in the kitchen making impossible cake and regaling Minerva with anecdotes than Ethel neutralizing all the effects of this delicious country air in her efforts to keep our cook contented.” So, after lunch, I put up the hammocks and then I insisted on Ethel’s taking her embroidery and coming out to the woods.

“And what will Minerva do? She is afraid of the crickets, and I dare not leave her all the afternoon alone until she is acclimated.”

“No, of course she can’t be left. I didn’t intend her to be left. I will go and learn how to make bread, or, better still, I will paint the floor. Doesn’t the floor need painting?”

“Now, Philip, don’t be foolish. Of course you can’t stay in the kitchen. It’s no place for a man—”

“Nor is it any place for a woman who has come to the country for her health. And yet Minerva won’t stay here alone. What’s to be done?”

Ethel thought a minute and then said:

“I have some plain sewing that I want

done and Minerva is very handy with her needle. She makes all her own clothes. She shall come to the pine woods with us and sew a fine seam until it's time to start dinner, and then we can go back to the house and sit on the piazza. It's not as pleasant as the woods, but we'll be within ear call."

This seemed preposterous, but if I disapproved and Minerva left, Ethel would be apt to blame me, so I consented and we all went to the grove, like a happy family of three. I read out loud from the new novel, but I don't think that Minerva cared much for it, because when Miss Pussy, who had accompanied us, brought a bird and laid it at her mistress' feet, Minerva broke right into my reading with:

"Why, Mis. Vernon, Miss Pussy has a bird, and it ain't a sparrer an' it ain't a canary. What other kinds is there?"

Then the reading was stopped while Ethel gave a lesson in ornithology to the child of the city streets. I did not mind her absorbing all the learning she could, but I resented the interruption and I arose and walked away, wondering how long this thing was going to last. I had no doubt that in another week we would be giving a party in Minerva's honour, and that we should take out a subscription for her in the Booklovers' seemed foreordained. She must learn "How to Know the Trees," and "How to Become a True Nature Lover in Six Lessons," and "How to Listen to Birds," and particularly "How to Forget the City." If I could get her that book I would be willing to pay almost any price for it. Also, "How to Teach a Cook to Depend on Herself for Her Joys." This traipsing around after us was not what I had expected.

My way led out to the road that runs below the pine grove, and I had barely emerged from the wood when I was hailed with a "Well, well, we are in luck! Where's the Missus?" and there were Harry Farnet and his wife Rose, looking lost in a three seated wagon drawn by two horses.

"Where did you drop from?" said I, for Harry Farnet is a New Yorker who generally runs over to Europe in the summer.

"Why, we're at South Edgeley for a couple of weeks," said he, "and the Longleys, who are staying at the Hillcrest, told us you had taken a cottage here for the summer, and so we thought we'd chance finding you in and take you back to dine and spend the evening, and then ride home in the moonlight. How's Ethel?"

"Ethel is middling well, but she's playing nurse girl to our cook and it is wearing on her just a little—and on me a great deal."

"What *do* you mean?" asked Rose.

"Why, we brought up Minerva, you know—the treasure that we've had for three winters, and we find that she needs a city setting to be a jewel of the first water. She is so lonesome that we spend most of our time coddling her. She's afraid of the frogs and moans for the delights of Gotham."

"Poor thing! Well, she won't have to bother with dinner to-night, so just give her a book—here, give her this box of candy. It's quite dreadful, but I'm sure she'll like it, and it'll keep her mind off her troubles for quite a while. Jump in and take us to your house. Is Ethel there?"

"No, we're all just up in the woods above. *I've* been reading to her, with interruptions from Minerva. Minerva and Kate Douglas Wiggin do not appear to be twin souls. Ethel! Ethel!" I called, and she answered, and a minute later she came in view and was both surprised and overjoyed to see the Farnets. Rose and she went to school together and they have always kept up an intimacy.

"Hello, you dear thing! You're going riding with us—going to take dinner with us—we're at South Edgeley, and in the evening we'll drive you back."

"Lovely!" cried Ethel, enthusiastically, and I was glad that the Farnets had come. Ethel needed company just as much as Minerva.

I heard a dead limb cracking in the woods above, and, looking up, saw Minerva, her eyes wide open and fearful, as if she thought we were going to leave her to perish in nature's solitudes. For Ethel was just stepping into the carriage.

"That's Minerva," said Ethel to Rose. "Our cook. You know her, don't you? Perfect jewel, but it's the first time she has ever been away from New York, and she is very mournful."

"So Philip was saying," said Rose. "I tell him to give her a box of this dreadful chewing candy. It's some we got at the only store in South Edgeley, and if she starts a piece it will keep her busy chewing for an hour at least. You're not afraid to leave her, are you?"

"No, I'm not afraid," said Ethel; "but I'm afraid she will be. She's a hare for timidity. Oh, Minerva! we're going for a ride and you needn't get dinner to-night. We'll be back before bed time."

"Go'n' to leave me alone in that God-forsaken house?" said Minerva, in such evident terror that Ethel shook her head at Rose and said, "I can't do it. It would be heartless. You stay here and dine with us. We have loads of provisions."

"No, Mamma will expect us. We told her we were going to get you and she'll expect us. Our landlady has two seats waiting for you. You must come."

Here was a vexing situation. It would be downright cruel to maroon Minerva, and yet we didn't like to give up our anticipated *pleasure.*

There was more noise in the woods and "Miss Pussy" jumped out of a tree with a chipmunk in her mouth.

"Oh, Mis. Vernon, look at Miss Pussy! She's got a striped rat. I never see sich a place for wild animals. I couldn' no more stay alone—"

She paused for a phrase strong enough, and Rose clapped her hands and said,

"I have it. Minerva shall be your maid and ride on the back seat. This old ark was the only thing we could get, but now the third seat will be of some use."

Miss Pussy dropped the chipmunk at Minerva's feet, and Minerva jumped backward pretty nearly a yard.

"She's killed it, Minerva. That chipmunk will never have a chance to hurt you," said I in a consolatory tone. That reminded me of "Miss Pussy."

"We can't take the cat along," said I to Ethel. "When the cat travels I prefer to be doing something else. I can still hear her cries on the train."

"Well, shut her up in the house," said Harry. He looked at his watch. "Come, it's time we were starting. It's up hill half the way back."

"You can say that of any drive around here," said I.

Minerva climbed in much as a mountain would have done it, and we started for the house to get wraps.

"The time we came up and this time are the on'y times I was ever in an open wagon," said Minerva.

"Minerva is getting loquacious," said I to Ethel.

Minerva overheard me and said,

"No, I ain't, sir, not when they's any one around. I'll git used to it if there's somethin' doin' all the time."

"You've got your work cut out for you," said Harry to me. "Master of the Revels. You might give her a lawn party—"

Rose shook her head warningly at her husband and we changed the subject, but it was plain to be seen that all Minerva needed was the excitement of society. If we made her our guest and I did the cooking we would have no difficulty in keeping her contented.

There was nothing worthy of note regard-ing Minerva during our ride to South Edgeley. She sat on the back seat and tangled her jaws in the candy, and I presume that she had a good dinner at the Farnet's boarding house. Certainly we did and we enjoyed that and the ride back very much, and rejoiced that we had friends so near, although as Harry did not own the horses and the haying season was "on," it was not likely that the Farnets and we would often meet, unless we walked toward each other and met at some half way point—and there again Minerva would be in the way. A three mile walk with Minerva tagging behind like a younger sister was not a tempting idea.

However, the doctor had said that Ethel must have a good long rest in the country, and her needs were paramount. Without Minerva to cook she could not rest, and we must keep Minerva though the heavens should fall.

We were talking quietly about Minerva that evening after the Farnets had driven home, when the light in her bed room that had been shining out on an elm at the side of the house, suddenly disappeared, there came a shriek, and then,

"Oh, Lordy, oh Lordy, leggo my hair."

I thought of tramps, but Ethel, being a woman, divined what had happened and bade me light a lantern quickly. I rushed to the kitchen and lighted it. The house was not on fire, that was certain. Minerva was either having a fit or an encounter with a burglar, for there was a sound as of heavy footfalls and choking ejaculations.

I seized the kitchen poker, expecting to sell my life at a bargain, but Ethel looked at me commiseratingly and with the one word "Bat," she hurried up the back stairs.

I must say that at first I took the word to mean that Minerva had been imbibing and I wondered at Ethel's using so idiomatic an expression, but when she entered the room and the sounds almost immediately stopped, to be followed by sobbing, I suddenly divined what she meant.

"No, Minerva, it isn't poisonous." (More lessons in Natural History.) "Probably the poor thing was more frightened than you are."

I did not think it at all likely. At any rate, it had been far more reticent.

"I'll give you a screen from the spare room to put in your window. It was attracted by the light. It's a sort of mouse with wings."

"Striped rats and mice with wings! Lordy, the country's awful!"

Poor Minerva! She must have been surprised to see that country horses were just like those of the city. Certainly a horse has more evil potentiality than a stupid little bat, but when a beast has you by the hair and you see him, as it were, through the back of your head, he is apt to loom large and terrifying.

Quiet was soon restored and Ethel came down with the lantern. I put away the poker which I had been holding ever since I picked it up.

"It's the greatest mercy in the world that the lamp went out. She knocked it over when the bat hit her."

"What next? Is the room moth miller proof? Could she survive a June bug?"

"Well, really, it's nothing to laugh at. If you ever have a bat in your back hair you'll not think of laughing."

As my back hair is fast going to join the snows of yesteryear, I considered this a most unkind cut, but I was above retaliating—as I could not think of anything to say.

"Well, Minerva has now been here a whole day and she's hardly been out of our sight. I admit that she is an excellent cook and a hard worker, but as a steady visitor who rides with us and sews with us she is likely to pall. Hasn't she a mother who can come and visit her?"

"No," Ethel answered, "Minerva is an only child."

"And a child only," said I.

CHAPTER III.

AN EAST WIND.

THE next morning broke with an east wind blowing and a wet rain falling, but Ethel said that the two days in the country had made her feel like a different woman already, so I did not mind the rain, although a rainy day in the country, unless one be well fortified, either by inner grace or outer books and the good things of life, is apt to be a dreary affair.

Breakfast was delicious. We have never had a cook who had so much—well, you might call it temperament, as Minerva has. She will toss off a roll with the lightness that makes it a work of art, and her fried chicken is better than the broiled chicken of most cooks.

Ethel already better, and the breakfast such a poem: why, I felt that I was to be envied, and I wondered how people could be content to spend their summers on alien piazzas, eating hotel dinners and watching hotel dwellers dress and pose and gossip.

There had been no more bats in Minerva's belfry, and as she had always seemed like a sensible girl in the city, I made up my mind that she was reconciled to the country and that in a few days she would begin to have very much the same feeling for it that we have—for Ethel and I were born in the city, and the country is an acquired taste with us.

But while I was browsing around in the Wheelocks' library, Ethel came to me and said:

"The worst has happened, Philip. Minerva says she won't stay—that she just can't. She wants you to get a horse and take her to the station right away."

I laid down my book with a sigh. "What's the matter now?" said I. "More wild animals?"

"No, it's the rain and the east wind. She says the moaning of it through the shutters is awful and she can't stand it."

"Might have known it," said I, bitterly. "I might have known it. You're beginning to feel better and the worst seems to be over, and then Minerva plays her trump card and takes the cake."

My metaphors were sadly mixed, but I didn't care. I was not at that moment trying to construct logical metaphors. I foresaw what would happen if Minerva left and Ethel went into the kitchen permanently. A sanitarium for her and I an enforced bachelor in some city room—for we had let our flat for the summer.

I do not often interfere with the household work, for my business keeps me at home most of the time, and I hold that when man and wife are both at home it is better to have but one housekeeper and that one a woman, but now I went out into the kitchen to try to mend matters, and I found Minerva looking at the steadily falling rain that was making Mount Nebo look like a ghost of itself. Now and again the blind rattled and always the wind moaned through it with a wintry effect that would have been admirably adapted to the return of the prodigal daughter.

And with each wail of the wind Minerva

answered antiphonally, almost as if she were taking lessons in keening.

"Oh, myomy, myomy!"

Back and forth she rocked, her eyes glued to the dismal prospect (dismal to her, but with a surpassing beauty to sympathetic eyes), and the tears rolling down her face.

"Why, Minerva, what's the matter? Got a toothache?" said I, affecting to be unwitting of the cause of her sorrow.

" 'Deed, suh, it's wuss 'n a toothache. It's the heartache. I knowed better when I said I'd come. Nance Jawnson told me how haw'ble the country was, but I felt sorry for Mis. Vernon, and so I come. Please get me away in a wagon. That wind whines like it was a dawg howlin' an' I can't stand dawgs howlin' 'cause my sisteh died of one."

Her words were ambiguous, but I was in no mood to carp or criticise. She was suffering as acutely as a little child suffers when you throw her doll over the fence and I felt I must cheer her up and keep her if it —if it took all summer.

"Well, Minerva, we can soon stop the *wind's* howling by opening the blinds." I suited the action to the words and the wild moaning of the wind ceased. It was really almost as if the wind had been asking to have the blinds opened.

"Now you see, Minerva, that's stopped and the rain will stop after awhile."

"Yas'r, but it's lonesome an' I didn't bring my 'cordeen. I forgot it till now."

I knew she was a great hand to be trying patent medicines and supposed she referred to some bottled stuff, so I said,

"Oh, well, if that's all, I can send for your medicine, or perhaps I can get some at Egerton."

She looked at me in surprise as she said,

"I didn' say nothin' 'bout med'cine. I said I left my 'cordeen—"

"Oh, your accordeon. Can you play that?" said I, thankful that she had forgotten it.

"Yes indeedy."

Her face grew pensive as she thought of the dreadful musical instrument which she had mercifully forgotten. I had never heard her use it at home, but Ethel told me afterward that she had been in the habit of going up on the roof with other cooks and the janitor, and that her departure was always followed by weird strains which Ethel had supposed was the janitor discoursing music that had the dyingest fall of anything ever heard. But it seems that Minerva was the performer, and among those whose ears are ravished by the "linked sweetness long drawn out"—and then pushed back again, she was accounted an adept.

Perhaps I could hold her by means of the accordeon. It was worth trying.

"Minerva," said I, "Mrs. Vernon tells me that you want me to drive you down to the station and get you a ticket for New York. Now, if you go it will be a discreditable performance and an act unworthy of one who has always been well treated."

I paused. The words were some of them a little beyond her, but they had made the more impression for that very fact.

"Mrs. Vernon is not strong enough to do the work and she came up here to gain strength. You are a very good cook, but if you left us now we would not care to have *you when* we returned to the city, and you will not find mistresses like Mrs. Vernon everywhere. There are those who forget that a servant is a human being, and you might happen to get such a mistress as that. I repeat that your going would be distinctly discreditable, utterly reprehensible and in the nature of a bad act. Now, if you must go, I am not the one to keep you, but if you go you go for good, which is not likely to be good for you."

"Yas'r," said Minerva, blinking at me.

"Now, if I send for your accordeon, will you give me your word of honour to stay your month out?"

I had used such a severe tone, mingled with what sorrow I could weave into it, and spotted with incomprehensible words, that Minerva was much impressed, and she said in a tone that was already more hopeful, "I give you my word, Mist. Vernon. My 'cordeen is like human folks to me."

"Very well, I will write for it by the next mail. Where shall I tell Mr. Corson to look for it?"

"Mr. Corson ain't got it. I lent it to the jan'ter the night befo' I lef' an' he fo'got to give it back an' I fo'got about it till the wind began to moan at me an' then I got mo' homesick 'an ever an' thought of it."

Think of being willing to swap the music of the wind for the cacophony of an accordeon! And yet, when some composer of the future introduces one in his Afro-American symphony and Felix Weingartner gives the symphony in Carnegie Hall, there may come a rage for accordeons and we shall no longer associate them with tenement houses and itinerant toughs, white and black.

I hastened to write the letter to the janitor, whose name was George W. Calhoun Lee, and Ethel, being housebound anyway, went into the kitchen to preserve some blueberries. I do not like preserved blueberries; neither does she, but there was nothing else she could think of to do in the kitchen, and Minerva needed "human folks" pending the arrival of the 'cordeen.

The Dalton boy came for the mail at noon and he had with him a string of trout. They were fresh from the brook and were still wriggling. I saw him pass into the house, and I followed him into the kitchen; for a string of trout is a joy to the eye—and I had a suspicion that Minerva would not know what to do with them.

She stared at them with the interest of a child, giggling every time one twitched its tail.

"Wha' makes 'em move that way?" asked she of no one in particular.

"Why, they're not dead yet," I answered.

"An' come all the way from New York?"

"Why, Minerva, these were caught in the brook down there in the valley. Weren't they, Bert?"

"Yes, sir. Ketched all five inside an hour."

Minerva's eyes opened wider. "What's a nower?" asked she.

Bert looked puzzled and so did Ethel, but I was able to explain and somehow the explanation struck Minerva as being very funny. She went off into a fit of laughter just like those she had had on the train when the cat howled.

"Inside a nower. That's one awn me. Inside an hour."

Ordinarily one does not go into the kitchen and provide amusement for the cook, but the events of the past few hours had so altered the complexion of things that I felt distinctly elated at having, in however humble a way, ministered to the joy of one as leaden hearted as Minerva and her laughter was so unctious, once it had got fairly started that first the Dalton boy, then Ethel, and at last I joined in and the east wind must have been astonished at his lack of power over our temperaments.

After the laughter had subsided and Bert had gone on his way with the precious letter to G. W. C. Lee, I was about to leave the kitchen, forgetful of my errand, when Minerva, in a tone of delightful *camaraderie,* said,

"Mist. Vernon, I can't skin them fishes alive. They always come skinned from the fish store."

"Well, I'll kill them and scale them and clean them, and you can watch me, and the next time you'll know how."

Ethel had finished her berry canning and she now left the kitchen, winking at me as *she did so* as much as to say it was now my turn at the wheel. It was years since I had dressed a fish, but I snapped each one on the head as I had been taught to do by country boys in my own boyhood, and then I prepared them for the pan, scraping off much of their beauty in the process.

"Do they have North River shad out in that brook?" asked Minerva as I worked.

I thought at first it was a little pleasantry, but, looking at her, I saw she was perfectly serious—in fact, very serious, and I explained to her that cod and blue fish and sturgeon and sword fish never penetrated to these mountain brooks, preferring the sea; and so, with cheerful chat on both our parts, we bridged over the end of the morning and a half a day was gone with Minerva in a better frame of mind than she had been the day before with the sun shining. So valuable a thing is diplomacy.

While I was washing my hands, preparatory to lunch, Ethel being engaged in fixing her hair, I heard Minerva break out into song, and a moment later someone began to whistle in the kitchen.

Our window commanded a view of the side

path, and no one had entered the kitchen since I had left it, but nevertheless two people were giving a somewhat unpleasant duet in the kitchen. The whistle did not accord with the voice, which had considerable of the natural coloured flavour—if flavour can have colour.

"Who can it be?" said I. "Minerva doesn't know a soul up here, and no one up here would be apt to know 'In the Good Old Summer Time.' "

"It's positively uncanny," said Ethel, taking the last hair pin out of her mouth and putting it into her hair. "I'm going to see. I want Minerva to make chocolate for lunch, and I forgot to tell her."

Ethel went down and I hastily dried my hands and followed. If this fellow musician could be caged I would keep him for Minerva's delectation. He should hang in the kitchen—so to speak. Minerva was evidently enjoying the duet—even more than we were.

I hurried and came within sight of the kitchen just as Ethel entered it. Ethel *turned and* came quickly toward me, her hand over her mouth to pen up her mirth.

We both rushed up stairs and sat down and had our second laugh of the morning in spite of the east wind. There was only one person in the kitchen, Minerva by name, and she was providing an obligato for her singing with her own lips. Minerva was performing the hitherto impossible feat of singing and whistling at the same time.

"When the 'cordeen comes," said Ethel, "Minerva will be a trio."

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIENDLY BURGLAR.

WE retired that night feeling that our hold on Minerva was stronger than it had been hitherto, and we slept the sleep of the unworried.

But we were awakened at a little past midnight by a noise as of a somewhat heavy cat coming up stairs. Miss Pussy is heavy, but her tread is absolutely noiseless, so it could not be she, and we could hear Minerva snoring in her room, so it was not she.

"It's a burglar," whispered Ethel, wide awake in an instant.

I did not like the thought, which waked me wide also. I like burglars in books, but in real life there are too many possibilities wrapped up in them to make them agreeable companions of the night.

I hope I am not a coward, but I am not warlike. If a burglar has resolved on entering my house I say let him get away with the goods and then I'll lose no time in putting in burglar alarms so as to be prepared thereafter, but to get up and attack a burglar with a chair or to attempt to expostulate with him lies outside of my province, and I hoped that these sounds would prove to be caused by shrinking wood or cracking plaster.

Creak, creak, creak. There was not a shadow of a doubt that some one was coming up the stairs. Ethel pulled the pillow over her face and I could feel her trembling. I sat up in bed and tried to feel brave. Tried it two or three times in obedience to the old saying anent succeeding but to be honest I did not feel brave.

The steps came nearer and Ethel, whose hearing is wonderfully acute, suddenly threw off the pillow, and sat up in bed also, saying:

"Philip, we must not let Minerva hear him or she will leave in the morning."

"Sh!" said I, "be still. There he is." We both put on the semblance of slumber.

The moon was shining into the room and we now saw a burly looking fellow with a bag over his shoulder walk past our door and peer into the spare room.

The Wheelock furnishings are plain and our own belongings would pack in small space and bring little in open market and it struck both Ethel and myself in spite of our fears that it was very funny for a burglar to be looking for plunder in our cottage.

I fancy that he himself saw he had picked out a poor house, for he left the spare room, contented himself with a casual glance into our sparsely furnished bedroom and then went creaking down the stairs again. Burglars in books make no noise, but I am sure I could have gone down stairs more quietly than he did and I was in an agony of fear—no longer of him but that Minerva might wake up and become panic stricken.

The burglar went as far as the kitchen and then he actually stumbled over a chair and this brought about the dreaded result. Minerva waked up and the next instant we heard a husky,

"Is that you, Mis. Vernon?"

Next we heard steps in her hall and the *query* repeated in a louder tone, "Is that you, Mis. Vernon?"

Then came a shriek. She had evidently encountered the burglar

"Oh, Philip, what *shall* we do?" said Ethel. "Don't you think it will be safe to go and tell the burglar to go away? Minerva will surely go into hysterics and leave in the morning."

"She's gone there now. Hear her!"

The noise occasioned by the advent of the bat was as nothing compared to the din that Minerva let out upon the midnight air.

And now we heard a man's voice, the voice of the burglar.

"Be quiet. I'm not going to hurt you. I made a mistake in the house."

Made a mistake in the house and the next one half a mile away!

"Philip, if he were a dangerous burglar he would have shot her by this. Go and speak to him and tell him to go away."

It was a risky proceeding, but after all we had gone through I was determined to keep Minerva with us at any risk, so pulling a dressing gown over my pajamas and leaping into my slippers, I went down stairs choking down my rising heart.

I met the burglar coming down the back stairs with his hands in his ears to shut out the shrieks that arose from Minerva.

When he saw me he sat down on the stairs and said, "I thought so. I thought she'd waken the house."

Now this was a queer way for a burglar to act and it gave me heart. By all the rules of burglary the man should either have given me one in the jaw or a bit of lead in the lung or else he should have rushed past me and escaped, but he sat down on the top step and reminded me of Francis Wilson by the quaintness of his intonation and the expression that came over his face.

"Come here. I won't hurt you," said I, much as I might talk to a huge mastiff whose intentions were problematical. "Are you a family man?"

"Yes," said he, astonished by the question into answering it.

"Well, then, you will understand my position when I tell you that the girl whom *you have* started into hysterics up there is our cook, our only cook, and if we lose her we'll be absolutely cookless. You're a burglar, are you not? Be frank."

"Well, if you appeal to me that way, I am," said he.

"Well, she's frightened stiff. Even if you go away now and nothing further happens she will follow in the morning because she will expect burglars every night. Now I'm going to try to convince her that you stopped in here to ask the way to the village or to borrow a book—anything but that you're a burglar, and I want you to help me out."

"The idea is farcical," said he smiling quite as if we were having a friendly chat after a dinner in his honour.

"No doubt it is farcical," said I, "but if I can overcome Minerva's fears by any means I'm going to do it. She'll go into a fit pretty soon if the cause is not removed."

"She's most there now," said the burglar. And he told the truth. Minerva had not ceased to use each breath in the manufacture of wild yawps that outdid her performances the evening of the bat.

"I'll go and tell her to dress and come

down and I'll explain it all to her. We have to handle her with gloves on account of cooks being so scarce. You understand?"

"I understand. I have a little home in Pittsfield and half the time my wife does the cooking although 'business' is unusually good."

"What is your busin—?"

I noticed his bag and stopped. How absent minded of me to ask.

"I don't believe it is always as bad as it is to-night," said I with a laugh. "My income doesn't admit of anything for burglars. I only make enough for myself and my wife."

"I believe you," said he. "I saw that when I got up stairs and if I had not kicked over that cursed chair I would have been a mile away by now."

I started to call up stairs to Minerva when the burglar's eyes moved to a point behind me and turning, I saw Ethel, fully dressed and very calm. Her fear of losing Minerva had overcome her fear of the burglar and she had come down to see what she could do.

"Ethel, this is the burglar who woke us *up, but* he has taken nothing, and he's going to fib a little so that Minerva may be brought out of her hysterical state. Please go up stairs and tell her to dress and come down; that there's no danger, but I want to see her about something."

With excitement and amusement struggling for the mastery on her features Ethel went up stairs and in a few moments the shrieks subsided.

"What induced you to come to such a place as this, so far off the line of travel?"

"Exactly that," said the burglar, "because it was off the line of travel and because I have made some of my richest hauls in houses like this."

"Aren't you ashamed to be a burglar?" said I, thinking that I might do some missionary work.

"Now see here," said he, rising from the chair in which he had seated himself after Ethel had gone up stairs, "I did not come here to be catechised or criticised. I came here to do business and I found it was impossible, so let us forget that I am a burglar and that you are a poor man and bend all our energies to retaining the services of your cook. As a fellow American I feel for you and I'd hate to see 'the Madame' forced to do her own cooking through any fault of mine. By the way, how's the larder?"

"The who?"

"The larder. What have you to eat?"

"Oh, I misunderstood you. I guess I can find something to eat. Are you fond of blueberries—not whortleberries, you understand, but blueberries."

"All the same, ain't they?"

"Not by a long shot. You're evidently a city man. A blueberry is to a whortleberry what a wild cherry is to an oxheart. We have plenty of blueberries and some milk and I dare say Minerva can boil you some eggs if you care for them."

"No, I don't want to bother you or her. Cooks object to getting extra meals."

I had not thought of that and I deemed it considerate in the burglar.

I led the way to the pantry, where I found a pitcher of rich milk and a pan of berries and when Mrs. Vernon and Minerva came down stairs, the burglar and I sat at the dinner table, eating berries like the best of friends.

"Frightened, Minerva?" asked I with a reassuring smile."

"Yas'r," was the monosyllabic and therefore reassuring reply.

"I'm sorry if I disturbed you, Minerva," said the burglar with an assumption of breeziness that sat very well on him.

Minerva smiled foolishly. She was abashed.

"I missed my way, Tom," said he, turning to me, "and it's a wonder I got here at all."

"Will you please explain why you call me Tom," said I, giving him a cue, "when my name is Philip Vernon."

"Simply because I've been spending a week with Tom," said he, "and he is very well indeed."

"Hasn't he had any return of those spells?" asked I with mock concern.

"No, Phil, Tom seems to be on the high road to recovery, now. His wife has a Dane for a cook and she makes the best omelets I ever ate. Can you make good omelets?" said he, turning to Minerva, whose eyes were riveted on this easy mannered friend who had reached our house so late.

"Yas'r."

"Pardon my suggesting it, Mrs. Vernon," said he, turning to my wife, "but would it be asking too much—"

"Why, I'm sure Minerva would be delighted to cook you an omelet. She knows what it is to be hungry. Don't you Minerva?"

"Yas'm," said she, going into the kitchen and setting a match to the fire which was laid in preparation for the morning.

"She looks like a good natured girl—one who would stick to you through thick and thin," said the burglar in a tone that would easily reach Minerva's ears.

"Minerva's a very good girl," said Ethel, sitting down in the chair I had drawn up to the table.

We talked on various topics, much as if we had known each other for years, but this was due more to the burglar's absolute ease of manner than to any self command on our parts. When Minerva came in with a smok*ing hot* omelet he said, "Handsomest omelet I ever saw. If it tastes like *that* I'll eat every bit myself. You're a born cook, Minerva."

Minerva grinned and went into the pantry whence she emerged with bread and butter.

As for the burglar he kept up a running fire of talk about supposed friends of ours.

"Rather sad, that accident to Tom's nephew, wasn't it?" said he.

"I hadn't heard of it," said Ethel, while I admitted a like ignorance.

"Is that so? Tom is no letter writer. Why little Sanderson fell down an elevator shaft and ripped all the buttons off his shoes."

He said this so seriously that it was all Ethel could do to keep a straight face.

"And Mary has finally decided to accept Jim Larkins. Seventeen times she had rejected him. Do you think they'll be happy?"

"I hope they will," said I, and then to make conversation I said,

"What's become of Ed. Cortelyou?"

"I'm sorry to say," said the burglar, with a long face, " that Ed.'s gone to the bad. It doesn't pay to trust a young man with unlimited money. If I ever succeed in amassing a fortune—not that I feel especially encouraged just now—but if I ever do, I will tie it up so that Charley can not play ducks and drakes with it."

"By the way, do you expect Charley to follow your profession?" said Ethel wickedly and unexpectedly.

The burglar helped himself to the rest of the omelet with a roguish grin and said,

"I wouldn't be at all surprised. Kate is all for having him study for the ministry, but I've seen enough misery endured by young ministers whose hearts were not in their work and who were perhaps tortured by this modern spirit of doubt, and I tell her that the profession that was good enough for his father is good enough for him."

There seemed to be something fascinating in the clear-cut tones of the burglar's voice for Minerva stood in the kitchen listening intently to every word.

"I hope you will enjoin on him the necessity of being honest," said Ethel with evident enjoyment.

"*Example* is better than precept, Mrs.

Vernon,'' said he, looking her straight in the eyes. ''I'm not much of a preacher myself. I sometimes say to him, 'Do as you see me do, my boy, but try to do it better.' I do hope to enable him to make an easy entry into the homes of really good people. I tell him that it's not always the richest who are the most valuable. He may be able to pick up something from a man who is comparatively poor, but who has good taste, and I tell him always to keep his eyes and ears open when he is in the houses of others, because there is no telling how profitable a good use of eyes and ears may be. The boy has quite a taste for rare china. He's managed to get hold of some handsome pieces.''

''Do you allow him much spending money?'' asked I with a deprecating smile.

''No, I don't give him any stated sum, but he has his own ways of adding to his income. I believe in making a boy self reliant. He wasn't over six when I gave him a little boost up the ladder as a starter, and told him to remember to rise superior to circumstances, and he made quite a comfortable nest egg. *Went into* the hen business. Selected his own hens and sold them at a profit. A boy that learns to be self reliant is years ahead of a boy who is pampered. Minerva, that was the best omelet I ever ate. I wish I could stay here and eat one of your breakfasts, but, Philip, if I expect to get to the McLeod's to-night, I'll have to be going right along. You see I expected to get here in time to dine with you, and leave about eleven, but I lost my way, and I know the Major will be expecting me and he won't go to bed until I come. I'm awfully sorry to go."

As he rose from the table I noticed the bag containing his plunder. Unless Minerva was an absolute innocent she would suspect that all was not right when he picked it up, but luckily at that moment she went out to the pantry to put away the milk, or something, and during her absence he picked it up with great nonchalance and walked out of the room, bowing to Ethel, who made a little gesture of repugnance when the real nature of his work was brought home to her in so concrete a manner.

I followed him out to the front door, where he deposited the bag on the step and said very suggestively,

"I believe I'll give Minerva a tip if you have no objection. She deserves it."

"Why, I have no objection," said I, "but it isn't necessary."

"Pardon me if I differ," said he, good naturedly, holding out his hand.

And then I understood that I was being held up.

"How much do you want to give her," said I, wishing now that he was far away.

But his demand was very reasonable—comparatively speaking,—for he said,

"I think that five dollars and a quarter would be a fair amount for me to give. She may not get every cent, but I've talked a good deal to-night and the laborer is worthy of his hire. You're a decent sort of fellow, or I might increase the amount."

"You'll have to come up stairs for it," said I, "I never carry much in my pajamas."

He followed me up stairs, his eyes roving all over the place.

"There must be a lot of high thinking done in this establishment,'' said he, as he looked at the sparsely decorated walls.

''It was a high old thought to get you to pose as my friend. If Minerva stays with us I'll think of you, and I wish that you might be induced to—''

''Don't, that's cant. You may think you mean it, but you don't. If you read in to-morrow's paper that I had been arrested, you wouldn't drop one tear. You live your life, and I'll live mine. If you ever have a chance to do a man a good turn, go ahead and do it, but I won't lie awake nights wondering whether you've done it or not.''

''No, I suppose you're not given to lying awake nights, but you may lie awake days and ponder on a good many things.''

''Don't you believe it, my Christian friend,'' said the burglar as we walked back to the kitchen, ''I sleep the sleep of the just, and the reason I'm just, is because I never rob a man that I know to be poor.''

We had now come down stairs again, and he went out into the kitchen, and I heard him say to Minerva,

''Minerva, here's some silver to add to

your collection. And don't ever make the mistake of leaving the Vernons. They are the salt of the earth. They may not be rich, but I am sure they're kind, and if you know when you're well off you'll stay with them. I've known Mr. Vernon ever since he was a boy, and if I was looking for a position like yours I'd try to get one with him. And Mrs. Vernon is just as good. You stay by them and they'll stay by you."

" 'Deed I will," said Minerva with the unction of one who has felt a revival of religious feeling at a camp meeting. The burglar had actually aroused in her a sense of loyalty.

I was sorry to see him go. I've known many an honest man who wasn't half as interesting, and I've known many an interesting man who was not much more honest, although I never had any words with a confessed burglar before. I actually found myself saying "Good luck to you," as he shouldered his bag and went off down the tree-bordered road in the silver moonlight.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONSTABLE CALLS.

NEXT morning we slept late, but when Mrs. Vernon and I finally awoke we heard no sounds in the kitchen.

"I have a headache," said Ethel. "That midnight supper didn't agree with me."

"Why you didn't eat anything."

"No, but I can't sit up late and feel good for anything in the morning. I suppose Minerva feels the same as I do."

"Yes, but as she is paid to forget her feelings, I suppose she'll get up and get breakfast."

"Do you mind calling her?" asked Ethel, and again donning my dressing gown I went to the foot of the stairs and called,

"Minerva! Minerva, it's half past eight o'clock."

No answer.

I went up stairs and stood outside her door.

"Minerva, it's time to get up. I know you must be sleepy, but it's half past eight."

"Mist. Vernon," came a languid response, "I don' feel like I could cook this morning, I'm so tired."

What was this? Was it insubordination? Perhaps it was, but I did not mean to recognise it as such. Who had prepared the midnight supper without a word? Minerva. Was I one to forget benefits conferred? No. Did I want to keep Minerva at all hazards? Yes. Was it wise to let Ethel know of the state of affairs? No.

Therefore I came softly down the stairs and going out into the kitchen, I built a fire and then went to work as dexterously as I could to cook things for breakfast. I poured a cup of cold water on three cups of oatmeal flakes and set them to boil, and while I waited for the water to attend to business I got a book and read. Really, this cooking is no such hardship as I had supposed, thought I. I was not as quick as Minerva, for I was an hour getting the oatmeal to a point where it looked palatable, and I made some mistake of proportions in making the coffee, but I sliced the bread very well, indeed, and I set the table without nicking a plate, and at last I put a half dozen eggs into the water in the double boiler and went up stairs to announce breakfast. Ethel had fallen asleep. I woke her and told her that I believed breakfast was ready. Then I went down to my book again.

Ethel can hurry upon occasion, and she was no time in coming down. But quick as she was, I was quicker, for I had the eggs on the table before she appeared, and when she came into the room we sat down together with never a suspicion on her part that Minerva had not prepared the breakfast. I felt the way I used to feel when I was a boy and used to do something a little beyond my supposed powers. My bosom swelled with pride as I reflected that every bit of the breakfast had been prepared by me.

Ethel uncovered the oatmeal dish and then she said, rather irrelevantly, I thought,

"What's the matter with Minerva?"

"Nothing, dear," said I, reaching out my hand for my portion.

Her only answer was to ring the bell.

"— Er — I believe Minerva is upstairs," said I.

"What has she been doing to the oatmeal?" said Ethel, poking at it with her spoon, but not attempting to taste the stiff-looking mass.

"Fact is, Ethel," said I, "Minerva is a little upset by last night's disturbance, and I cooked the breakfast."

"You mean you didn't cook it," said Ethel, with just a touch of sarcasm.

"Well, what I didn't do, I didn't do for you. I thought you'd had enough of the kitchen, and if you disguise this with sugar and cream it will be all right."

But this was an exaggeration. We could not pretend to eat the gluey mass, so I said,

"Well, anyhow, there are nice fresh eggs. It doesn't take a great deal of skill to boil them."

"Did you use the three-minute glass," said Ethel, as she helped me to two eggs and then took two herself.

I told her that I didn't know what she meant; that I used no glass at all, but had boiled them in the under part of the oatmeal boiler, as I had noticed Minerva do.

"Yes, but how long?" asked Ethel, as she took up her knife and chipped the shell of one.

"About an hour and a half," said she, answering her own question. "You meant well, Philip, but you didn't know. These are as hard as a rock and not yet cold. I hope the coffee is better."

Ethel is not usually so fault finding, but I laid it to her broken sleep, and said,

"The *bread* is *cut* pretty well. And the butter is just as good as if Minerva had put it on the table herself."

"Yes, the bread and butter are quite a success, Phil, but this coffee —"

"Mild?" said I, taking my cue from the color of it as she poured.

"I should say so. It looks like a substitute for coffee."

"Then I guess I don't care for any," said I. "But anyhow, you didn't have to do any of the preparing, and we'll leave it for Minerva to wash the dishes."

I helped myself to milk and managed to eat an egg, but they are not very good when hot and hard, unless they are sliced and reposing on a bed of spinach.

I began to feel a little hot myself that Minerva should have led me to this successful exposure of incompetence, and leaving the table I went up stairs and called out somewhat angrily,

"Minerva, we're all through breakfast and you'll have to come right down and prepare lunch, as nothing has been fit to eat."

A snore was the only response that she gave, and I was glad she had not heard me. One cannot afford to be peremptory if one has but one string to one's bow. I came down stairs again.

Ethel was in the kitchen frying some eggs and preparing some more coffee.

"Is she coming down?" asked she.

"Er—no—she's tired. But Ethel, I can't have you getting breakfast. I've already got one, and although it wasn't a success, we'd better make it do. You look tired out after the excitement of last night. Let's eat some berries and drink a glass of milk and wait for lunch. Wasn't that burglar funny last night?"

"Philip, are you going to let Minerva stay in bed all day?" said Ethel.

I sat down on the kitchen table and said,

"Ethel, would you like to be waked up in the middle of the night and forced to prepare an extra meal? Minerva is a human being and she is tired. You're a human being and you're tired. Let us let Minerva spend this one day in bed taking the rest cure, and after we've eaten this second breakfast, which smells pretty good, *we'll* spend the day out doors."

"But Minerva is insubordinate."

"Very well, let us call it that. Suppose we suppress her insubordination and she works for us all day and takes the evening train for New York, will the thought that we have suppressed insubordination in a cook get us a new servant? Insubordination in the city, where there are whole intelligence offices filled with girls looking for new places, is a thing that I can't and won't stand; but insubordination, with Mamie Logan sick with scarlet fever and no other girl in the world that I know of, is a thing to be coddled, as you might say. Call it weariness caused by over-service and it immediately becomes a thing that we can pardon. Do you want to pack up and go back to New York?"

Ethel assured me that she did not.

"Well, then, don't let us talk any more about insubordination. We'll eat what you set before us, asking no questions, and then we'll go out for a long walk."

We went out for a long walk, and both of us succeeded by sheer will power in forgetting that Minerva existed. We made believe that we could live on the delicious air that blew so gently at us, and for two or three hours we wandered or sat still, or Ethel sketched and we were thoroughly happy.

It was about noon when we returned to the house. We heard loud voices and stopped to listen.

"I tell you he was a frien' of Mist. Vernon's," we heard Minerva say.

"Well, then, Mr. Vernon has a thief for a friend."

We exchanged meaning glances. Our friend of the night before had evidently been traced as far as our house. There was nothing to do but to go forward and accept the inevitable.

I went into the kitchen, followed by Ethel. A large, determined looking man was sitting on a chair in the middle of the floor; by his side stood a strapping mulatto, and Minerva, stopped midway in her dishwashing and with something of sleepiness still in her eyes, was standing by the stove.

"How are you?" This from me.

"Good morning. My name is Collins, and I'm a constable. The Fayerweather's house was robbed last night and the thief got away with the goods."

I assumed a look of great unconcern, but I felt that Minerva was devouring me with her eyes.

"That's bad," said I.

"Yes, it's bad, but it might be worse. I find that he came as far as here, and your girl says that you entertained him with a midnight supper. Where is he now; *hiding?*"

His tone was insolent, and my tone was correspondingly dignified.

"Why, I haven't the slightest idea where the thief that robbed the Fayerweather's is now," said I, wishing with all my heart that the constable was on his vacation at some pleasant summer resort, far, far away.

"Minerva," said I, trying to take the bull by the horns, "what makes you say that I entertained a thief last night?"

"I didn' say so, Mist. Vernon. This ge'man said that a man, now—robbed that house, an' ast me if we had a mid—a midnight vis'ter; an' I said no one but your frien' that I cooked the om'let for; an' he ast me how he looked, an' I told him it couldn' be him, because you an' him was great frien's, an' I knowed you wasn' no frien's with a burglar."

"Hm," said I, wondering why in thunderation I had been placed in such an unpleasant position as this, solely through my well-meant efforts to keep Minerva contented.

"Did you entertain a friend here after midnight, last night?" asked the constable, who seemed a painfully direct sort of individual.

"There was a man came here late last night, and we had a little chat together, and a—a little supper, you might call it."

I paused and looked at Ethel. She was the color of a carnation.

"Go on," said the constable.

At this I remembered my dignity, and again stood upon it.

"Why should I go on? Who are you to cross-question me in this way?"

"I am the constable, as I said before, and I consider it very suspicious that you should be visited by a man who had a bag that jingled, at midnight."

"Why shouldn't it jingle at midnight?" said I with a desperate attempt to impart a tone of lightness to the conversation. "If I choose to give a meal to a wayfarer with a jingling bag, I suppose it is my own concern."

"Mist. Vernon, he warn't no tramp. He was a good dresser," said Minerva, looking at me reproachfully.

"Was — this — man — a — friend — of

— yours — or —not?" asked the constable doggedly.

"He was a friend of mine last night," said I, thinking of the debt of gratitude I felt I owned him when he went away.

"Did you suspect him of being a thief?" said the constable, in such a casual way that without thinking I said "Yes."

Minerva's arms had been folded on her breast. They dropped to her side. Ethel slipped behind the constable and went into the parlour—to cool her red cheeks, I suppose.

It was certainly a very unpleasant position for both of us, and I felt that my white lies were coming home to roost way ahead of roosting time.

"Did he give you a part of the spoils as a reward for having fed him?"

"No, sir." This indignantly.

"He didn't give you this?" said he, pulling out of his pocket a silver vase.

"No."

At this Minerva actually began to sob. "Oh, Mist. Vernon, how could you say that? I found that vase in the kitchen this morning, and this man says it was stolen from them people. Oh, why did I come up here?"

"Philip, you might as well tell the whole story," said Ethel, coming back from the parlour. "We'll probably lose Minerva now, anyway."

"So there *is* a story," said the constable, crossing his legs in a most irritating way. In fact he couldn't have done anything that would not have been irritating.

I saw that the best thing to do was to tell the truth, ridiculous as it might sound with Minerva there. Indeed, the very fact of my telling it might soften the girl and show her how much we were willing to descend in our efforts to keep her valuable services. But I made a wrong start. I said:

"I knew that the man was a burglar—"

Minerva immediately burst out sobbing and left the kitchen and went to her room, and my mental eye could see her remorselessly packing her trunk.

"Go on," said the constable, and then, "Go outside," said he to the mulatto.

"Well, now that they've gone," said I in a relieved tone," I can tell you the whole thing, farcical as it is. Have you a servant?"

"My wife has a hired girl. What's that got to do with it?"

"Do you have trouble in keeping her?"

"We have trouble in keeping *them.* It's one after another. They all get the itch for the mills or the stores."

"Good! Then you'll understand me," said I, and I told him the whole story, going on to say:

"When we were roused by this burglar, and I realized that Minerva would throw up her position if she was unduly startled, I resolved to throw myself on the burglar's mercy, and ask him to pose as my friend, so as to deceive Minerva. It worked all right, or would have worked all right if you hadn't come here to upset her worse than ever. She's probably packing her trunk, now—"

"By Godfrey, I'm sorry," said the constable, who seemed a very decent sort of fellow, now that I knew him better.

"You may well be sorry," said I, with considerably more spirit than I had yet shown.

"Of course, I understand that you are doing your duty, but it's always best to come to headquarters in an affair of this kind. You got only a garbled version from Minerva. I have given you the facts. The burglar evidently left that cup by mistake, and the Fayerweathers are welcome to it. I'm sure I never want to see it again. It would be a perpetual reminder of our loss of Minerva."

The constable rose. "It's a durned shame," said he, "but of course I didn't know anything about you. So then you don't know where the burglar went after he left here?"

I hesitated. It did not seem honourable to tell even the little I knew about the man who had been my guest.

"He went out the front door," said I, "but where he is now I haven't the shadow of a suspicion."

The constable opened the kitchen door. "Come along, Jim," said he.

Then he took his leave.

Overhead Minerva was preparing for the same thing.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS PUSSY TRIES FLY PAPER.

IN the back hallway, up stairs, there was a long wooden chest, half full of old magazines. Behind it mice had established a home. I did not know this at the time, but was to learn it a few minutes after the constable left.

We stood in the kitchen, Ethel and I, listening to the heavy foot-falls of Minerva. She was evidently packing her trunk. Suddenly there came a mewing at the kitchen door, and I opened it for the entrance of Miss Pussy, who made a bee line for up stairs, one of her hunting grounds.

"We might hide Miss Pussy," said I, "and then Minerva wouldn't go."

Minerva's voice has a penetrating quality, and in a minute we could hear her making a confidant of Miss Pussy.

"Miss Pussy, you an' me is go'n' back to the lovely city. Country's ba-ad 'nough, but livin' with the frien's of burglars is wuss. What you want, Miss Pussy?"

The voice came out into the hall; Minerva had evidently followed the cat out.

"Yeah, you'll get a mouse behin' there. You wait—"

We heard a grunt such as some people make when they lift something heavy, and then a characteristic chuckle, and then a half agonized,

"Ooh, come out, come out, Miss Pussy. You'll git squished. I can't hold it. Come out."

"What *is* happening now?" said I to Ethel.

"Oh, some of her tomfoolery. I'm out of patience with her."

"Mist. Vernon! Mist. Vernon! quick! qui-i-ck! I can't hol' much longer! Pussy'll be squished!"

I rushed up those familiar stairs, followed by Ethel, and there stood Minerva, her eyes nearly popping out of her head as she tried with bare success to hold up the heavy chest *full of* magazines.

Of the cat nothing was to be seen except a twitching tail that told me she was underneath the chest watching a mouse in calm obliviousness of the fact that her mistress was using all her strength in an effort to save her from becoming only a map of a cat.

"Hold on a minute," I cried, rushing to her assistance, but just as I reached her the chest slipped from her fingers.

But a cat with all its nine lives fresh within its young frame, is not easily "squished," even by so heavy a thing as a chest full of magazines, and Miss Pussy's body darted out just in time. Not so the tip of her tail which, whisking behind her as she turned to rush out, was caught between chest and floor, and acted like a push button on a call bell, for she emitted a continuous yawp that lasted until I had lifted the chest again.

Cats generally see where they are going, but Miss Pussy had been looking behind her at the spectacle of her imprisoned tail, and when I released her she sprang high in the air and landed compactly and dexterously on a sheet of sticky fly paper.

Never can I forget the look she gave us over her shoulder as her feet struck the gluey mass. To give herself a leverage by which to pull her dainty fore-paws out of the entanglement, she sat down—temporarily, as she thought—permanently, as the fly paper decided.

We *were* sorry for the cat, but being Americans we gave ourselves over to mirth at the picture she presented. The pencil of a Frost is needed to adequately represent her agonised twisting on the sticky sheet. At last, by a Herculean effort, she extricated her fore paws and walking glue-ily to the head of the stairs she dragged herself along on the fly paper as if she were part sled, part cat. Coming to the head of the stairs she attempted to walk down in the manner of trick cats, but not being used to the exercise she turned a series of summersaults instead, and landed at the foot so completely enmeshed in sticky fly paper that it would have been a small fly, indeed, who could have found a place for his own little feet upon its yellow surface.

I have often derided the witless persons who found amusement in what I call pantomime catastrophes, but this simple conjunction of cat and fly paper was as funny as anything I ever looked at.

"It'll spoil her nice fur," said Minerva, running down stairs after the cat and overtaking her at the kitchen door, which I had fortunately closed. A sympathetic hand picked up the papered cat and attempted to divorce her from her adhesive mantle, but when I came down it looked to me as if there were far more fur on the "tanglefoot" than Pussy had herself, and the ungrateful animal had scratched her benefactress as well as she could with glue covered talons. Then spitting and swearing, Miss Pussy dashed through the kitchen window, not waiting for it to be opened, and went to her first retreat, where she remained for the rest of the day, ridding herself, after the manner of cats, of as much as she could of the flies' last resting place.

It suddenly occurred to me that the time was ripe for more diplomacy, that even now, at the eleventh hour, I might save Minerva to the house of Vernon, and things would continue to go on as smoothly—as before.

"Minerva, you saved Miss Pussy's life by holding on as you did," said I. (I said nothing about her asininity in lifting the chest for Miss Pussy to creep under it.)

"Might as well be dead as all gawmed up with that fly paper stuff."

"Well, she has a cat's tongue, and she knows how to use it. She'll be as sleek as sealskin by to-night. Minerva!"

"Yas'r."

"Minerva, if I raised your wages, do you think you'd stay with us? Of course, you know I never saw that man until last night."

"Then how'd he know so much about them children and all them people?"

"That was just his funny way. He was making believe—just—just to make talk. But you haven't answered my question. Would you stay if I raised your wages?"

"How much?"

There was no use in my being mealy mouthed now, and so I flung economy to the four winds of heaven and said:

"*Thirty* dollars a month."

Minerva gasped. The bait was in her throat.

"Thirty dollars a month right through the summer," said I.

"I'll stay, Mist. Vernon, jes to help you out, but I do hate the country and the night time. If it was all day long all the time, I could stan' it. If I could git to bed about eight o'clock, I wouldn't mind it so much, but you have dinner so late, I don't get the dishes washed in time."

I pondered, and just then Ethel came into the kitchen.

"Ethel, Minerva is going to stay with us for the summer, but she is afraid of the dark, and thinks that if we could have dinner earlier she would like it better."

Ethel sniffed. She sniffed disdainfully.

"When would you like to have it, Minerva?" said I, hoping that the sniffing would cease. Sniffs are not a part of diplomacy, by any means.

"If you had it at five o'clock, I'd get to bed at eight."

"Five o'clock is ridiculous," burst out

Ethel. I looked at her warningly, but she did not pay any attention to my signal.

"No, Minerva," said she. "Six o'clock is plenty early enough."

"Well," said Minerva, actually putting her hands on her hips, a new attitude for her, "I'm on'y staying now to oblige, and I'll have to go back, I reckon."

Now this was a little too much, but for the sake of keeping her and the health of my wife at any cost, I said:

"Well, Minerva, I suppose that in spite of Mrs. Vernon's objection to the hour we'll have dinner at five, but I tell you plainly that it is because I do not want Mrs. Vernon to be left without a servant."

"You're a very ungrateful girl, Minerva," said Ethel with a strange lack of tact. "Mr. Vernon has put up with a great deal from you, and you act as if you were ill treated."

"I'm kep' a prisoner in the country, an' that's ill treatment all right," said Minerva, sullenly, and I motioned to Ethel and we left the kitchen together.

CHAPTER VII.

MINERVA'S PASTORAL.

NEXT morning was a pleasant one, and as soon as breakfast was over I went out into the kitchen and told Minerva that if her friend did not delay, her musical instrument ought to arrive by Friday. I found her in her usual state of good temper.

"That little place where you were sewing, out there in the woods, will be a very good spot in which to play it," said I suggestively.

"Oh, I kin play it anywheys," said she with a kindling glance, that bespoke the artist of temperament, absolute master of his instrument. So Paderewski might speak of his ability to play a piano in a drawing room car.

That morning I had a notion to go fishing, and I asked Ethel to join me, but she said she was tired, and laughed as she said it. Of course Minerva was the real reason.

"I wish that houses were automatic," said I, "so that they could run themselves. Just think how nice it would be to have a house fitted to run by steam all day long, by simply dropping a five dollar gold piece in the slot in the morning."

"How expensive," said the economical Ethel.

"I don't think so," said I, "there's many a housekeeper who would be willing to give up many things if five dollars a day would bring relief from household sorrows. 'No servants needed. A child can run it. Can be fitted to any house. Gas or electric or steam motive power. Not half the danger from explosions that went with the old system when servants were liable to go off at any moment. Come to our warerooms and see a large house running by itself.' There's a fortune in the idea."

"Well, you have the idea," said Ethel. "Go sell it."

"No, I'm going fishing."

The great advantage that fishing has over some sports is that one does not need ability or paraphernalia of any sort beyond those of the most primitive type. Your hammer-thrower needs brawn, your chess player brains, your golf player a caddy—and a vocabulary, but anyone can go fishing. Of course there is a great difference between going fishing and catching fish, and I am one of that large army that goes fishing and returns from fishing as innocent of fish as at the moment of departure.

But to the man with eyes, there are many things besides fish that he can catch, and, although no hint of a nibble came to my patient fingers, I reveled in the day and would have stayed longer if I had not felt anxious about Ethel and Minerva. What could they do to amuse each other, with me away?

I made my pleasant way back up the hills, so reminiscent of Scotch scenery, and knew very well the sarcasms that would greet me when I acknowledged that I had possessed no magnetism over the fish. Ethel always has a store of amiable causticisms for me when I come back from a fishless expedition.

When I returned I found the house empty and the gluey Miss Pussy shut up and miaowing in the kitchen. I was startled at first.

I had come up by way of the pine grove, and there was no one there. I called my loudest and no one answered. Had Minerva obliged Ethel to get a horse and wagon and take her to the station in my absence? It looked like it. The fire was nearly out, the dishes all washed, the floor freshly mopped. That was it. Minerva had swept and garnished the house and had then left it, and in a short time Ethel would come back disconsolate, and then —why, then we would pack up and go back ourselves.

The only thing that did not fit in with my conjecture was the presence of Miss Pussy. It did not seem as if Minerva would go away and leave her precious cat.

I heard a rattle of wheels. Bert Dalton was going to the village. I would go down with him and ride back with Ethel. She had probably hired the Stevens' horse. I hurried out and hailed Bert, and he stopped.

"Going to the village?"

"Yes, sir, want anything got?"

I explained the situation. and joined him, and we were soon out of sight of the house. *I looked* at my watch. If we hurried I could yet get to the station before the train for New York came in. I told Bert so, and he quickened the horse's pace.

About half a mile on our way I heard some one calling for help. Bert heard the call, too, and just as I was going to say "stop," he stopped of his own accord. We both jumped out. The noise came from a field on our right, mostly given over to blueberry bushes, but with a little timber on its farther edge.

"Help! Murder!" It was a high-keyed woman's voice.

"Tramps," said Bert, as we hurried on.

"Hysterics," said I, for I was sure I heard laughter alternating with the screams. And the laughter had a strangely familiar sound.

On we ran, the screams continuing, and at last the sounds were located, that is, the screams were. They came from a low growing chestnut. Perched in its branches sat Minerva, her face the image of horror, and below on a fallen trunk sat Ethel, laughing, with the tears rolling down her cheeks. By her side were two tin pails, nearly full of blueberries.

"Minerva, stop that screaming. I tell you she won't hurt you," said Ethel, and then went off into another fit of laughter, and Minerva yelled blue murder again.

Neither had seen us.

"Come up here, Mis. Vernon. He'll kill you, shu's you' bawn."

"She's gone away. You've frightened her. Come down."

"Oh, Lawdy! Lawdy! *Lawdy!* Why'd I come? He'll shu'ly kill us."

When we saw that the danger was imaginery, I signalled to Bert, and we both stepped out of sight of Minerva and Mrs. Vernon, in order to see the comedy. Ethel's perfect calmness and her amusement, but slightly tinged with sympathy, formed such a striking contrast to Minerva's abject fear. Who was this he-she that was threatening Minerva's existence?

There was a rustling in the bushes, Minerva's screams redoubled, and in spite of her 180 pounds she climbed still higher into the tree.

And then the cause of all the commotion *showed* "himself." A mild-looking Jersey cow, all unconscious of the agony she was causing, came into view and advanced toward Ethel, sniffing.

"Don't you overturn our berries," said my wife, walking toward the creature. The cow was evidently a pet, for as Ethel put out her hand to shoo her away she sniffed expectantly and put out her tongue in hope of receiving some little delicacy.

This so terrified Minerva that she took another step upward, put her faith in a recreant limb, and, just as Bert and I discovered ourselves to Ethel, our "cook lady" fell out of the tree and landed smack on the cow, who kindly broke her fall and then broke into a run, kicking her heels and waving her tail, after the manner of her species.

Minerva was not hurt, thanks to the cow, but she was much agitated, and it was some time before we could make her listen to the words of wisdom that all three poured forth with generous ease.

"It was such a lovely day, we thought we'd go berrying," said Ethel. "You got my note, I suppose."

"No, I did not. I made up my mind that

you were taking Minerva to the train, and as Bert passed by just then, I came down with him in order to go back with you."

"Then how came you here?" asked Ethel.

"How came we here? *How came we here?* Why those screams went beyond Mount Nebo. You'll see people pouring over the edge of it in a few minutes. Such shrieks I never heard outside of a mad house. I thought it was Indians."

Minerva's agitation had now taken the form of sobbing, and as she mopped her face with her apron it began to dawn upon her that she had not been in danger until she took to the tree. She helped herself to a handful of berries, and they seemed to do her good, for she listened to Ethel's account of what had happened and punctuated it with what at first were chuckles, and when the humour of the thing had soaked in far enough were her irresistible guffaws, so provocative of laughter in others.

"We were picking berries and enjoying ourselves very much when I heard a rustling and looked up, and there was a cow. I said rather hastily, 'Oh, look,' and Minerva looked and screamed out, 'It's a bear,' and before I could tell her what it was she had gone up that tree as if she had lived in the country all her life. She begged of me to come up with her, but I got over my fear of cows some time ago." This with a conscious blush, for Ethel knew that in times past she, too, had fled from a cow.

I turned to Minerva. "Do you mean to tell me that you never saw a cow before? There are cows in the city."

"I never saw one."

"Haven't you seen pictures of them on groceries?"

"I spec I have, but comin' thataway at me it looked like a bear."

"Very like a bear," said I. "Well, it's lucky you weren't hurt. You can thank the cow that you didn't break your back. I hope you didn't break hers."

She went off into yells of laughter at this mild bit of humour, and cheerfulness now being restored, I thanked Bert for giving me a lift and told him I didn't care to go any farther.

He left us and we went on picking berries, and before the pail was full Minerva had a chance to pat the fearsome beast that had so nearly frightened her to death. Now that she knew it was merely a cow, the source of the milk and cream of which she was so fond, she had no fear at all, being in that respect different from Ethel, who in the beginning had feared cows because they were cows, just as certain other women fear mice because they are mice, and as Lord Roberts fears a cat because it is a cat and not "the enemy."

The whistle at the Wharton Paper Mill told us it was twelve o'clock, and like hungry mill hands we started for home. Minerva walked ahead with both pails, and Ethel and I followed.

Half way up Minerva burst into song.

"How volatile!" said I.

"The worst is over. We'll have no more trouble with her," said Ethel.

So lightly do we attempt to read the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE 'CORDEEN COMES.

THAT afternoon Bert brought an express package to Minerva.

To *her* it was a package of sunlight. In *fact* it was the accordeon.

As soon as Minerva opened the bundle she stopped cooking dinner and began to play on her beloved instrument. Such sounds I had hoped never to hear again, and I went out into the kitchen and told her that I was sorry, but that I could not stand it in the house.

She looked up from the instrument, and there was a world of appeal in her eyes. I had never seen so much expression in them, Music certainly had power over her.

"Oh, Mist. Vernon, it'll be dark after the dishes is washed, an' I don' dah go in the woods," said she. "I'll play sof'."

"Yes, but you'll delay dinner."

She actually came over and laid her brown hand on my sleeve.

"Mist. Vernon," said she, in honey tones, "I'm on'y gettin' dinner at five to please myse'f. If I git it at six Mis. Vernon will like it better. She said so. I won't play long."

But I was determined not to listen to such music as that in the house. So I went out doors.

Ethel was sitting at the window of her bedroom. When she saw me she put her hands to her ears and made a grimace.

I made signs to her to come down.

"Let us be diplomatic," said I, when she had come down stairs. "Let us go for a long walk."

The hideous "upside down music" assailed us until we were fully a half a mile away.

"Ethel," said I, "we haven't gone about this matter of keeping Minerva in the right way."

"Meaning what?" said Ethel.

"Meaning that we are trying to make her like a thing she does not understand. The *country* is an unknown land to her. We must try to make her acquainted with it, and perhaps she will love it so much that we will have hard work getting her to go back with us."

"Well, goodness, that is hardly worth striving for," said Ethel. "There are only three months up here, but there are nine months in the city, and we want her there."

"Well, we won't educate her up to that point, then, but we must do something to make her more contented. She is just as much a human being as you and I, and I dare say that her summer is just as much to her as ours is to us. We are depriving her of recreation pier amusements, of ice cream, of band concerts, and what are we giving her in return? We ought to go out and get some one of her own colour to come and call on her."

"Don't be absurd, Philip. Minerva is not a farce."

"No, she is only getting to be a tragedy. But I'm not absurd. Next to Minerva's love for the city is her love for people. If we can't make her love the country, we may be able to make her love the people of the country, and I am going to ask Bert if there is not some respectable man or woman who could be hired to come here and call on Minerva every day."

Ethel looked at me expecting to see a twinkle or so in one or another of my eyes, but I was not thinking of twinkling. I never was so much in earnest. Minerva was plainly sorry that she had been impertinent and I was going to be eminently just.

We dismissed Minerva from our thoughts, or at least I, man-like dismissed her from mine. I don't suppose that Ethel was able to do so, but we did not talk of her again, preferring to drink in the beauties of nature and call each other's attention to each draught. Rare is that nature lover who can silently absorb the loveliness of a landscape.

Nor would I laugh at those who call on their companions for corroboration of their views as to views. It is simply another way of sharing delights, and that man who gobbles up a landscape and never comments upon it is not likely to have kept silence from Japanese motives. They say that the Japanese take the appreciation of beauty so much as a matter of course that they never refer to the rapturous tints in an orchard of peach blossoms or the tender greens of a spring landscape, feeling that it would be an insult to invite attention where attention was already bestowed; but with us of the West, when a man refrains from speaking about this lordly oak or that graceful dip of hill, or those clouds dying on the horizon in every conceivable colour, the chances are that he is thinking of his business affairs, and the clouds die and the hills dip and the tree spreads not for him.

Many of these graceful thoughts I expressed in fitting words to Ethel, so it will be seen that our walk was not without interest, and as she in turn said many quotable things, which I now forget, the walk was prolonged until to our astonishment we found that it was seven.

"Hungry as a bear?" asked I.

"Indeed I am. Probably Minerva has been holding dinner in the oven this half hour, and it will not be fit to eat."

We hastened our steps, and in a few minutes our home burst upon us—also more strains from the accordeon—together with plunks from a banjo.

We heard the plunks before we saw who was supplying them, but in a moment the musician was seen to be seated upon the front verandah.

He was a tall, good-looking mulatto, and I at once recognized him as being the man who had driven the constable over that morning.

Ethel stopped short, and became angry at the same instant. I stopped short and became amused at the same instant, thus showing how the same acts will affect different natures; also showing how a person can do two things at once and do them both well. For there is no question but that our stops were as short as they could have been, and our anger and amusement were well conceived and well carried out.

Ethel was too angry to speak. I was too amused to keep silent.

"It's scandalous," said Ethel, as soon as she could find words.

"It's just right," said I. "And it has

given me a good idea. After dinner I will tell you about it."

The banjoist had seen us first, and had told Minerva, and both had jumped to their feet, the man to bow and Minerva to run into the kitchen, where she was followed by her friend.

By the time we had come up to the front path to the veranda the coloured man had come out from the kitchen and in most melodious tones said,

"Minerva wanted to know if you would like dinner served on the piazza, the evening being so pleasant."

Delmonico never had a head waiter with the aplomb, the native dignity, the utter unconsciousness of self that this superbly built man displayed.

I felt that we had suddenly fallen heir to a fortune, and a group of retainers, and trying to play my part to the best of my ability I said,

"By all means—er—"

"James."

"By all means, James. Is it ready?"

"I will ascertain in a moment sir," said this yellow prince, and retired to the kitchen, whence he emerged in a moment.

"A slight retention in the oven in regard to the roast, sir, but the soup will be ready immejutly."

Ethel had gone up stairs at once. I nodded my head gravely and said,

"Very well, James," and then I went up to make my toilet.

"The tide has turned, Ethel," said I when I reached the room. "A kind Providence has sent the grandson of some Senegambian king to wait on us and to amuse Minerva between meals. Put a ribbon in your hair, and I will put a buttercup in my button hole, or I will dress, if you say so, and we will put on the style that befits us."

"Who is that man?" said Ethel.

"In fairy stories wise people never question. They accept. This is the constable's driver, and he was probably attracted here by the dread strains of the accordeon. Let us make the most of him. I am quite sure he is going to serve dinner, and I feel it in my bones that he will do it well."

And he did do it well and the dinner was worth serving. It had been delayed by the concert, there was no doubt of that, and it was nearly eight when we sat down to it, but the silent, graceful fellow, moved noiselessly in and out from kitchen to veranda, the whippoorwills sang to us, the roses filled the air with fragrance, and a silver crescent in the west rode to its couch full sleepily.

This may sound poetic. If it does it is because we felt satisfied with everything once more, and satisfaction is poetry.

After the dinner was over Ethel went out into the kitchen about something and found Minerva smiling and bustling around to get the dishes washed in a hurry.

"Mis. Vernon," said she, "that man wants to know if Mist. Vernon has any work for him to do."

"That man" was out on the veranda clearing away the dessert dishes.

"I'll see," said Ethel. "How did he happen to come here?"

"Why, Mis. Vernon, that man is related with my folks. His aunt's brother married my aunt's niece. I don' know what that makes him to me, but he remembers me when

I was a little gal in New York, and he reckernised me as soon as he saw me. He says—"

The approach of James prevented her from saying anything further, but as soon as he had gone out for the coffee cups, she continued:

"He says that he's on'y be'n workin' with that policeman while he was manufacturin' hay, an' he'd like to do odd jobs."

"I'm afraid they'll have to be real odd ones," said I when Ethel told me what had transpired. "But if it is going to make Minerva contented we will have him come and paint the porch green to-morrow, and red the day after."

I sat and smoked peacefully for a few minutes. James had taken the last saucer out to the kitchen, and Ethel sat by my side, looking out into the waning light of day.

Suddenly there came the strains of "Roll Jordan, Roll," in the form of a soprano and bass duet.

Minerva's playing on the accordeon had not prepared me for the sweetness of her voice, which is perhaps not strange, and of *course I* knew nothing of James's capabilities as a vocalist until I heard his rich, mellow baritone blend with her warm soprano.

The effect was delightful. Not since I heard the original Fiske Jubilee singers, twenty-five years ago, when a boy of six or seven, have I heard any negro music that satisfied me as this did.

"Ethel," said I, "we are It. Is there a local charitable organization or a Village Improvement Society, or a Mother's Meeting that needs help?"

"What are you after now," said Ethel.

"Minerva's pleasure first and foremost, but also the amelioration of the bitter lot of parties at present unknown, by means of a concert to be given at the house of Mrs. Vernon, by James and Minerva."

"Philip!" said Ethel.

"As near as I can make out," said I, "I am devoting this summer to the building up of your health by a life in the country, free from cares. To do that we must have a girl, and there is but one girl that we know we can have, and that is the girl we do have. Can't you imagine how Minerva will take fire at the thought of singing in a concert?"

"I suppose she would like it," said Ethel, "but how do you know that we can get people to come?"

"We needn't worry about that part of it at first. First of all we must begin our rehearsals, and they will take time. Do you appreciate that fact? And very first of all, I'll go out and interview James."

"Philip," said Ethel, rising and looking at me with a vexed expression, "I wish you had more dignity. I'll go out and tell James that you wish to speak to him."

"Not at all," said I. "What! You go out and tell him? Wait. Sit where you are, and all will be well."

I was beginning to feel in holiday mood, for I was sure that I had struck on an arrangement that would tide us over at least a fortnight.

I went out to the kitchen.

"Minerva," said I, "Mrs. Vernon would like to speak to you."

I then went back to Ethel and said, "I have asked Minerva to come. When she comes, tell her to send James. We will do this thing in style while we are about it."

Minerva came in, her face all smiles.

"Minerva, ask your friend James to come out," said Ethel. "Mr. Vernon wishes to speak to him."

"That's it! That's *style!*" said I, as soon as Minerva had gone. "Now is our dignity preserved, and James feels that he has fallen among people who know what's what. Do you want to be present at this interview?"

Ethel decided that she did not, and went into the parlour as James came out of the kitchen.

"Did you want to speak to me, sir?" said James respectfully.

"Yes, James. What is your last name?"

"Mars. James Montgomery Mars."

"Minerva tells me, James, that you are looking for work."

"Yes, sir; for congenial work."

"Would singing be congenial work?"

"Singing's a pleasure, sir. It ain't work."

"I've been thinking," said I, "that what this section needed was a concert for the benefit of something. Now, Mrs. Vernon likes to make other people happy, and while we were listening to you and Minerva sing, it struck us both that a concert of old plantation melodies like those you could sing, would be well received, say at the Congregational Church at Egerton. I would pay you a coachman's wages for staying here and practising, but all the money taken in would go to—"

"The Hurlbert Hospital. That's what they always do with the money up here, sir."

"Oh, I see, like the Liverpool Sailors' Home."

He did not understand my allusion, but I did not explain. Allusions that are explained lose half their charm.

"What do you think of the idea?"

"I think it's all right, sir. But between singing what would I do?"

"Do you love nature?"

"I don't know's I know what you intend to mean, sir."

"Does it make you happy to be out doors?"

"Oh, sure. I'm an out-door boy, all right."

"Well, Mrs. Vernon, in her desire to benefit humanity—You understand me, James?"

"Oh, I get the words all right. I don't rightly see your drift."

"What I want to say is, that Mrs. Vernon wishes to make Minerva love out doors as well as you do, and she is going to teach her some of the things that a country-bred man like you knows by heart. How to tell an oak from a maple at twilight."

"Oh, that kind has been here before. The Wheelocks, that had this house last year, went out in the woods with these here glasses and they brought things up close with them. They never cared for nature unless they had their glasses."

"James, I'm afraid it is apt to degenerate into something like that, but—James, if I tell you something, will you respect my confidence?"

"Will you please say that in different words?"

I thought a moment while I chose simpler words.

"Will you say nothing to Minerva, if I tell you something?"

"Oh, sure."

"Well, this concert and these nature lessons are solely for the purpose of keeping Minerva's mind off herself and the city. She wants to go back to New York, and we want her to stay here all summer, and—"

I explained it all to him, and the fellow seemed to enter right into the spirit of the thing, and assured me that he would do all he could to help.

"Where do you live?"

"Down in the valley a bit. When shall I show up in the morning?"

"The earlier, the better. I want you and Minerva to begin to practise for the concert right away. Do you sing by note."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, have you any book of negro melodies."

"No, sir. Wouldn't do me much good, sir, as I can't read music."

"Oh, I thought you said you sang by note."

"Yes, sir. Note by note, right along. I have a good ear, but I can't read music."

"Very well, James. Come in the morning prepared to sing note by note, by ear, anything you can remember. Do you know 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot?' "

"Indeed I do. Oh, I know all the jubilee songs, and all the rag-time songs, and I guess we can fill up a couple of hours singin' in the old Congregational Church."

He chuckled.

"What is it, James?"

"Why, I was thinkin' that here the white folks sing down there every Sunday in the church, and if I care to go an' hear them it don't cost me a cent, but if Minerva and me sing there in that same church, the white folk'll have to pay money to hear us. 'Tain't gen'elly that way."

CHAPTER IX.

A NAKED SCUTTERER.

THE next morning was one of those days that sometimes come in the summer, when the most desirable thing to do is to sleep. The air was soft and damp, and sleep inviting, and when something awoke me at six o'clock, I drowsily looked at my watch and dreamily realised that I was not compelled to catch any train, but could sink into delightful unconsciousness once more.

Just what had waked me I did not know, but before I went off again I heard the voice of James out doors, and then I heard the voice of Minerva, evidently at her open window, saying:

"I'll be down in a few minutes."

And then I dropped off, to be awakened again in what seemed like a moment by these beautiful words:

"Oh, de debbil he t'ought he had me fas'.
Le' my people go.
But I t'ought I'd break his chains at las',
Le' my people go.
Go down Moses, way down in Egypt la-an',
Tell ol' Phar'o' fo' to le' my people go."

It was melodious, it was harmonious, but it was also six o'clock in the morning.

"Oh, won't they stop," said Ethel, sleepily.

"Not by my command," said I. "They are practising for the concert."

"Oh, I'm so sleepy! What time is it?"

"Oh, 'twas a dark an' stormy night,
Le' my people go;
When Moses an' the Israelite,
Le' my people go."

"*Make* them go," said Ethel, her eyes wide open, but her mouth passing from the words to a yawn.

"And it's such a beautiful morning to sleep," said I.

But as verse after verse rolled out sonorously, sleep fled from the room in dismay, and we followed. and for the first time since we had come to the country, found ourselves as one might say, up before breakfast. The morning air was delightful, but we knew the danger that lurks in morning air on empty stomachs—or we thought we knew it. If there is no danger in such exposures I make my humble apology to those who hold the contrary opinion. Personally I do not know what is right to do—that is, hygienically right to do, at any given moment.

May I be forgiven for digressing at this point, in order that I may touch on a topic that has been near my heart for a long time, but has never had a chance for utterance before. I was brought up to believe that water with meals was a very bad thing, so I went without water at meals, and thrived like a green bay tree.

One day a doctor told me that water with meals was the one thing needed to bring out the tonic properties of food.

I immediately began to drink water with my meals in perfect trust and confidence, and —I continued to thrive like a green bay tree.

When I was a boy, I was told that tomatoes were exceedingly bad; that they had no nutritive qualities, and that it was but a few short years since they had been called "love apples" and had rightly been considered poisonous.

With unquestioning faith I refrained from eating the juicy vegetables and remained free from all the diseases that follow in their train. I had not tasted a tomato, and I did not know what I was losing.

One day when feeling a little off my feed, a young doctor friend said, "What you need is the acid of a tomato."

With an unfaltering trust I approached a tomato and ate it and realized the many, many years that were irrevocably gone; years in which I might have eaten the succulent fruit—for a tomato is a fruit; there's no question of it.

After that day I made a point of eating tomatoes whenever I could and I remained free from the diseases that had been said to follow in their train.

I blindly follow the dictum of the last doctor who speaks and it is to that fact that I attribute my good health.

I read somewhere not long since that the best way to keep free from colds was to sit in draughts as much as possible and I believe there is a good deal of sound sense back of that dictum, but Ethel will not let me try the virtue of the thing.

No doctor has told me that it is right to take long walks on an early morning empty stomach and so I have not done it, but I have an English friend who used to walk twenty miles or so to breakfast. The English are always walking twenty miles to somewhere, and look at them. A fine race!

The Americans are not much given to walking, but look at them — a fine race!

Everything is certainly for the best — always, everywhere.

We walked around to the kitchen and found Minerva on her knees before the fire watching insufficient kindling feebly burn while James sat on the kitchen table swinging one long leg and teaching her a rag-time melody.

He rose to his feet as we came in and gave us a hearty good morning and then burst into a good-natured laugh that showed all his beautiful white teeth.

"Made an early start, sir."

"Yes, James. It isn't absolutely necessary for rehearsals to begin quite so early," said I. "It woke us up."

"There, now, Minerva, what did I tell you? I was sure they'd hear it."

"No question about your filling the church."

" 'Deed I'm awful sorry," said Minerva, "Wakin' you so early, an' the fire not kindled."

"Well, never mind. We'll drink some milk and then we'll go for a little walk, but I think that to-morrow perhaps the rehearsals needn't begin until after breakfast. There'll be a long morning before you and you can rehearse in the morning and take the nature study in the afternoon."

"Yas'r," said Minerva, a shade of reluctance in her tone which I attributed to the mention of nature study. Minerva evidently wanted life to be one grand sweet song.

All that morning snatches of melody floated over the landscape in the which landscape we were idly lolling under the trees reading, and I think that household duties were neglected, but that James was not averse to work was shown by the fact that he carried great armfuls of kindling wood into the kitchen.

When Ethel went out there just before lunch she found the west window banked up to the second sash with kindling wood.

Ethel likes to have the whole house in ship shape order, and this unsightly pile of wood in the kitchen went against the grain. There was enough there to last a week and meantime the kitchen was robbed of that much daylight.

James sat on the door-sill idly whittling a piece of kindling and Minerva, temporarily songless, was getting lunch ready.

"Oh, James," said Ethel after a rapid survey of the situation, "I wish if you haven't anything else to do that you would pile that kindling wood out in the wood shed."

She told me he burst into his hearty laugh, and, rising with alacrity, he said:

"Certainly, Mrs. Vernon," and for the next half hour he was busily employed in undoing what he had done in the half hour before.

"Oh, it will be easy to find employment for him along those lines," said I when she told me. "We'll just make him do things and undo them and that laugh of his will keep Minerva sweet natured and he'll earn his wages over and over again."

"Well, it seems sort of wicked to make a human being do unnecessary things just for the sake of making him undo them again," said my mistress of economics.

"In cases like that the end justifies the means."

After lunch that day Ethel interrogated Minerva as to her feelings.

"Oh, Mis. Vernon, James is like human folks to me. He's in a way different from you an' Mist. Vernon."

"Do you mean you think he's better?" said Ethel, more to draw Minerva out than for any other reason.

"No, but he's more folksy. You an' Mist. Vernon, after all's said an' done, is white. It ain't dat he's kinder dan you, but he's more my kind. My, he'd be lovely in de city."

Minerva sighed.

"Minerva, don't think about the city. you wouldn't have such a chance to sing together in the city as you have here. I couldn't get up such a concert as this is going to be in the city, but up here you have just that much more freedom."

"Minerva," continued Ethel, "You needn't scrub the kitchen floor this afternoon. I want you and James to join a little school that I am going to get up."

"Never did like school," said Minerva.

"Well," said Ethel, feeling that she had approached the subject in the wrong way, "I don't mean a school where you have to sit in a stuffy room and do sums on a board and learn to read and write. I mean that we are going out into the woods to learn something about the denizens of the woods and fields."

" Yas'm," said Minerva.

Minerva was an emotional being. There was never any doubt of that. I think it was *the next* day that Ethel and I were returning from a walk and we saw James leave the kitchen and go around to the front of the house as if he were looking for some one.

When he saw us he said:

"Have you seen Minerva?"

We told him we had not, but just then we all saw her coming out of the woodshed with a handful of kindlings, her cat, still somewhat sticky, perched on her shoulder.

She entered the kitchen and I was just about to ask James a question about the Hurlbert Home when the now familiar shrieking voice of Minerva came to us through the open kitchen window.

"Ow, ow, take it away. Ow, I'm bitten."

Ethel, alarmed, started for the house. I, nonplussed, stood still. James burst out laughing.

A moment later Minerva came running out of the front door, her apron over her head.

"What is it, Minerva?" said Ethel, taking hold of her and uncovering her face.

"Ow, Mis. Vernon, dere's der stranges' animal in the kitchen. Tain't a dog an' it has a mouth like hinges, an' I'm afraid it'll eat Miss Pussy up."

"What a child you are, Minerva," said Ethel. "There's no animal there. I'm sure of it."

"Let's see what it is," said I, and turned to speak to James, but he had disappeared.

I could hear his hearty voice shattering the air with laughter, but I could not see him.

"Come, we'll go in and see this beast," said I. "Perhaps it's a rat."

" 'Deed it ain't a rat. I ain't agoin' in. It's scutterin' all over de place, an' it's stark naked."

Scuttering all over the place and stark naked. A light burst on me.

Ethel and I went in hand in hand, because her hand sought mine. I can not say that I was afraid.

When we reached the sitting room we could hear the scuttering together with other noises that were not pleasant, and I realized that to metropolitan Minerva the animal must be very terrifying if, indeed, he proved to be what I thought he was.

Minerva had evidently slammed the kitchen door after her, for it was shut.

I opened it and the stark naked scutterer turned out to be a little pig not much bigger than Miss Pussy and as pink and nude as Venus rising from the sea.

The little chap was frantic and he rushed through the dining room into the sitting room and thence to the front porch.

Minerva had been standing there wringing her hands, with her back to the house. It therefore happened that she did not see the innocent little porker coming. His only idea was to get out of doors and away, but he blundered in doing so, for he ran plump into Minerva, who sat down on him as promptly and then in her agitation she rolled off the front steps to the front path, and the squealing piggy, freeing himself from her skirts, ran off down the road.

"Ow, he's bit me. He's bit me," said Minerva, sitting up in the path and rubbing her knee.

I am not entirely at home in natural history, but I do not think it is the habit of little pigs to bite, and I told Minerva so, but she insisted that she was bitten, and nothing would calm her until Mrs. Ethel took her into the kitchen and satisfied her that she had not been bitten at all.

Minerva's plight had its funny side, and James evidently thought so, for he now came into view and said,

"She's the most fidgety girl I ever saw. I brought her a present of a little pig and left it in the kitchen for her, and the pig has never been away from its mother before, and it was most as much frightened as Minerva was."

"What she needs is lessons in natural history, James. The other day she mistook a cow for a bear, and the only animals she seems to know are horses and dogs and cats."

"I guess I'll go get that pig," said James. We could hear the little animal squealing. It was running madly around in the lower lot.

"I'll help you, James."

Afterwards I was sorry I had said I would help James. I had never chased a pig before, and I did not know they could cover ground so quickly or so unexpectedly. Twice I was bowled over in my efforts to grab the slippery beast, and by the time that he was caught I was winded and perspiring.

"I'll take it into the kitchen and show it to Minerva and tell her how it happened," said James.

"Yes, do," said I. "The only way to get her broken to pigs is to show her that they do not intend any harm."

We went into the kitchen and found her laughing hysterically, while Ethel was picking up pieces of crockery that decorated the floor. It seems that the lunch dishes were piled up preparatory to washing them and piggy had run against the leg of the table and dislodged them with destructive effect.

James entered the kitchen, holding the pig clasped to his ample chest.

"There, Minerva, you see the animal is perfectly harmless."

"My, *my,* I never did see such a mouth," said she.

Ethel does not like to touch strange animals, but she wished to show Minerva how perfectly innocuous this little piggy was, and so she stroked its pink little snout and the next instant the little fellow had her finger in its mouth and sucked it as if it were a stick of candy.

This at first frightened Minerva and it did not please my fastidious wife, but for the sake of the object lesson she said:

"Now, you see, Minerva, this pig is even more harmless than a cat, for a cat has claws and this pig has only—"

Alas, for Ethel. The pig showed what it could do by inserting its pearly teeth in her finger.

She snatched her hand away in a moment, but Minerva's confidence in pigs had been so lessened that we told James that he would better take his gift elsewhere.

For my part I was not sorry to see the shiny little creature go. Pigs have never appealed to me as household pets. My ancestors came from England.

CHAPTER X.

WE PLAN A CONCERT.

IT was the day after we had given up that particular spot in the woods as a trysting place and we were all driving to the village in Bert's wagon.

We were going for two reasons; Ethel intended buying Minerva a new dress (for out doors), and I was going to find out something about the concert which I proposed giving.

Ethel and I took turns in driving, while James and Minerva sat on the back seat.

Great billows of clouds lapped the shores of blue above us and cast huge shadows on the hillside; shadows that moving changed the entire aspect of the places over which they passed.

Bobolinks launched themselves and their songs at the same time and gave to the day a quality that no other songster is ever able to impart. It was a morning to inspire happiness.

"What a heavenly country this is," said Ethel; "I'd like to live here until the leaves color."

"I dare say it would be nice here in the winter time, too."

"Oof!" shuddered Ethel. "Pretty but dreadful. How can anyone keep warm in the country in the wintertime?"

Her remark had been heard by Minerva, and she said to James:

"Do folks leave here in winter?"

"No, indeed," said James. "Winter's the best time of the year up here. I jus' like the cold. Coastin' from here to the village, a mile and a half. Everybody does it. And skating! Umm. You ought to stay up here in winter."

"Oh, lawdy, if it's so sad in the summer I'd die in the winter. Don't the wind howl like a dog?"

"Like a thousand dogs, but I like it. You come up here an' visit my old mother in the winter, an' I'll teach you to skate and you'll never want to go back."

"Imagine Minerva here in winter," whispered Ethel to me. "Poor thing. She would die of the horrors. But, do you think she is more contented?"

"I certainly do. She is going to have new clothes—Is that a sheep?"

It turned out to be a rock. "There are no sheep around here," said Ethel. "Bert said so."

"I wonder if Minerva would be frightened at sheep?"

"She might be. The most peaceful animals aren't always the most peaceful looking. I think a cow is much more diabolical than a lion as far as looks go. A lion is kind of benign and I dare say that a lion that has just eaten a man looks sleepy and contented and good-natured as he licks his chops."

"I think the most dreadful looking beast in the whole menagerie is the goat, although, come to think of it, he is more likely to be found in the back yard than in the menagerie, and I dare say that Minerva knows him like a book. Yes, he has the devil beaten to a pulp, as Harry Banks would say, and yet he never has the bad manners to spit like the—

what was that beautiful beast that spit in the face of that pompous little man down at Dreamland?"

"Oh, you mean the llama. Wasn't that funny? And he did look so innocent. And now that spitting is a misdemeanor and the practice is going out, I suppose the llama will steadily increase in value—"

"Do you mind if we sing, Mr. Vernon?" said James, respectfully.

I thought a minute. If James had been driving and Minerva was by his side on the front seat it would have been perfectly natural for Ethel and me to break out into song on such a perfect day in such a lonely place. As the conditions were reversed; as I was driving and James and Minerva were on the back seat, it seemed to me perfectly proper that they should be the ones to break out into roundelays, and I told them to break out—couching the permission in other language. They began, after a whispered consultation, and the song which they sang was as follows:

"Ma-ah ol' missus said to me
(Gwan to git a-home bime by)
Whe-en she died she'd set me free
(Gwan to git a-home bime by)

Oh dat watermiyun
(Lamb er goodness you must die)
I'se gwan fer to jine de cont'aban' chillun
(Gwan ter git a-home bime by).

"Whe-en she died she died so po'
(Gwan ter git a-home bime by).
She lef' me wuss'n I was befo'
(Gwan ter git a-home bime by).

They had started the chorus of the second verse, throwing themselves into it with all the abandon of bobolinks—black bobolinks—when we came to a turn in the road and heard a clatter of hoofs and a smart turnout belonging to summer people from Egerton drove by.

I recognized in the ladies who were leaning languidly back on the cushioned seats two New Yorkers whom we met at a tea last winter and who seemed to take an interest in Ethel, so much so that I told her at the time that if she had had any social ambitions I was sure that here were stepping stones.

But I am quite sure that the stepping stones marveled greatly at the spectacle and the sounds we presented. Driving a chorus out. We looked back after we had passed and found that they were rude enough to be looking at us.

"Do you care, Ethel?"

"Well, I wish they had been some one else. It must have looked silly."

"Not at all. It looks perfectly business-like. Or it will look so later. When Mrs. Guernsea and her daughter see the announcements of the concert they will realize that we were doing a little preliminary advertising to whet the appetites of the populace. They will come to the concert. Mark my words."

As we were now within sight of the houses of the village, I told James that I guessed we'd better postpone further melody until our return, as we might be taken for a circus, rather than a concert, and the rest of the way was made in silence.

While Ethel was buying clothes for Minerva, I, by the advice of James, sought out Deacon Fotherby of the Second Congregational Church.

He presided over the destinies of a shoe-store, and when I went in he was trying to force a number eight shoe on a number nine foot of a Cinderella of uncertain age, whose face was red—from his exertions.

I waited patiently about until the good deacon got a larger shoe, called it a number seven (may the recording angel pardon him) and slipped it on the foot of Cinderella, who departed simpering.

He came up to me in a business-like way.

"Is this Deacon Fotherby?"

"My name is Fotherby, but I sell shoes week days."

"Well, *Mr.* Fotherby, I don't want to buy any shoes to-day, but I do want to know whether you are interested in the Hurlbert Home."

The deacon's manner underwent a remarkable change. Up to that time he had been the attentive salesman. Now his face softened, he motioned me to a seat and sat down beside me.

“Interested? I'm wrapped up in it. What do you want? To help it or be helped by it?”

“Both in a way,” said I, as I thought of what the concert was going to accomplish for me.

“I am in a position to give a concert of negro melodies for the benefit of your home. I control—in a measure—two colored persons who have fine voices, and it occurred to me that the villagers and perhaps the summer people would attend a concert given in your church.

“Yes, they would,” said he, rubbing his hands. “And we could provide some attractions out of our own ranks. There's a male quartette in the Sunday-school—”

“White?” said I.

“Why, certainly,” said he.

“Well, I'm a person entirely devoid of race prejudice, but you must remember that this is New England, Massachusetts in fact, and if we wish to make a success of this concert we must not mix the two races. I see no reason personally why your white quartette *should* not sing on the same stage with our colored singers, if they sing as well, but I am quite sure that the public would not patronize the concert if we advertised it as a mixed affair.''

The good deacon rose from his seat and said, ''Why, my dear sir, I consider that a colored man has just as white a soul as a white man.''

I also rose and told him that I could not swear as to the color of any soul; that souls might be a delicate pink for all I personally knew to the contrary. I also told him that I would not object to attending a concert of beautiful voices that came out of white and black throats (I was not flippant enough to say that all throats were red) but that I knew my fellow Yankees too well to think that they would care to come to a concert where whites and blacks sang on the same stage.

''It might go in the South,'' said I, ''where their ideas about such things are different from ours, but up here if you want our colored concert to be a success you must let all the singing be done by colored folks and all the hearing be done by white.''

At this point the talk drifted to the negro question and what a problem it was getting to be and I found that we thought alike on most points, and I finally made him understand that I was acting from diplomatic motives entirely, and because I understood the temper of the New Englanders so well.

"Remember that it was in a town in Connecticut," said I, "that a colored man was ejected from a white man's restaurant, and it is in New England that little colored children have a hard time at school, because they are black, and for no other reason. Being in New England, the country of liberty, you must give me the liberty of arranging my concert so that it shall be a success, and therefore (I smiled) there must be no mixture of races on the stage."

We decided that the early part of September would be a good time to give it, as the haying would by that time have been done and we could count on a larger audience.

On the way home James told me that he had a brother and a little sister, who could be brought into the concert, and that with them he could furnish some very nice quartettes.

Ethel looked at me meaningly, and said, "Minerva might go there and practise. Do they live at your mother's?"

"Yes, ma'am."

I realized that it would be better for them to practise at his house than at ours, because, while the practice of music makes perfect, it sometimes also makes maniacs.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HORSE IN THE KITCHEN.

"NOW, I'll tell Mis. Vernon, if you do dem tricks. Stop."

"Why, he's perfectly harmless, Minerva. Look, I'm holding him."

"Don' you let him get at me. Mah goodness, he has a head like a horse. Ooh, Lawdy, where's he gone?"

It was raining and Ethel and I were in the sitting room when we heard these loud words and then Minerva burst into the room.

She had her skirts held at a height that would have been all right for ballet dancing, but Minerva is not a ballet dancer and Ethel bade her remember herself.

Now it seemed to me that that was exactly what she was doing. Fright is memory of self as nearly as I can make out, and Minerva was evidently frightened at a new animal that "looked like a horse."

I had a mental picture of a pony that James had smuggled into the kitchen and then I remembered that New York was not a stranger to ponies and that perhaps in her childhood Minerva might have ridden a pony in Central Park or at Coney Island. No, it must be some other beast.

"What is the matter. Don't you see that Mr. Vernon is reading to me?"

"But it jumped at me!"

"What jumped at you?" said I sternly. If there is anything that I dislike it is to be interrupted when I am reading. If interruptions ever came in the midst of prosy descriptions I would not mind it at all. I could even stand it in the midst of a digression (like the present one), but interrupters have the uncanny knack of timing their breaks so that just as the author has led up to a brilliant *mot* and the moment is psychologically perfect, they say their little say and when the reading is resumed the humour or the wit of the sentence has evaporated.

James now appeared in the doorway.

"What jumped at Minerva, James?"

"It was on'y a grasshopper, sir. Never

saw anyone afraid of a grasshopper before."

"Why, Minerva!" said Ethel. "You said it looked like a horse."

James, with a chuckle, stooped and picked something from the floor. It bent its legs for a spring as he put his hand down and again Minerva screamed. It leaped with a thud against his palm and he held it between thumb and forefinger and said,

"She's right. It does look like a horse."

I had never noticed the resemblance before, but there was no gainsaying it, once our attention had been called to it. I imagine that if the head were increased to horse size and the body and legs were in proportion, it would be a more formidable looking beast than the hyena. And if a hyena were reduced to grasshopper size he would be as "cute" as a caterpillar.

"Minerva," said Ethel, "sit down. You may go, James. I wish you would not scare Minerva."

"Never thought she'd scare so easy, Mrs. Vernon," said he respectfully. He was always respectful. He went out into the wood shed to split some kindlings. He had already split enough to last us all of a winter, but it was healthful exercise and I kept him at it when he was not singing or mowing the lawn.

"Minerva, I don't suppose that there is a more harmless insect in the world than a grasshopper," said Ethel.

"What are they for?" said Minerva.

"Why—er," said Ethel, while I held my book up before my face discreetly.

"Why, they are to hop in the grass."

"Oh," said Minerva.

"Yes, they can hop many times the length of their own bodies."

"Oh," said Minerva.

Ethel made a mental calculation.

"I should say, Minerva," said she, "that a grasshopper can hop about one hundred and twenty times his own length. How tall are you?"

"I'm five feet three," was her unexpected answer.

"Well, call it five feet," said Ethel, with a very serious face. "If you had the power of a grasshopper you could hop six hundred feet. That is to say, you could hop a *long* city block."

The idea of Minerva hopping from Seventh Avenue to Eighth (for instance) was too much for me and I began to cough so hard that I had to go up stairs for a trochee.

When I came down Ethel was saying,

"You've heard the noises in the grass, haven't you?"

" 'Deed I have," said Minerva, dismally.

"Did you know that the grasshoppers make a great deal of that noise?"

"No'm," said Minerva, her mouth wide open.

"They do. And how do you suppose they do it?"

"They blow, I suppose."

"No, they don't blow. Do they, Philip?"

"No, very few grasshoppers can blow. They can blow away, but they make that noise by—er—why, they make that noise —"

The words of a college song came into my head, "I can play the fiddle with my left hind leg."

"They make fiddles of themselves and play, Minerva."

Minerva looked at me seriously.

"That's it, Minerva," said Ethel eagerly.

"They scrape their wings in some way and that makes the sound. You don't know how many things there are to learn about the country and, Minerva, it isn't half as dangerous as the city. To-morrow if it is pleasant, we'll go out and try to catch a grasshopper playing his little fiddle. You may go, now, Minerva."

Minerva went out and closed the kitchen door and the next minute the house shook. I thought of the powder mills at Mildon. Again the house shook.

"It is Minerva hopping," said Ethel.

"Pretty close to six hundred feet, from the sound," said I.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE SIMPLE LIFE."

I HAD strung up a hammock between two trees in front of the house and days when Ethel did not feel like walking she used to lie in it while I sat by her side and read to her. She would have been glad to read to me some times, but if there is anything I dislike it is to be read to. I can never follow what is being said unless I have a book in front of me, and besides as I cannot knit and do not know how to draw it would be time wasted for me to sit still and listen to reading.

We are so built, the most of us, that we consider we are wasting time unless our hands are moving. If a woman sits with her hands in her lap thinking great thoughts she is manifestly idle. But if she sits embroidering tasteless doilies and thinking of nothing, she has found something for her hands to do and Satan is foiled again. How often he is foiled these days.

As I say, I do dislike to be read to, so while Ethel sits and crochets or knits or does fancy sewing, I sit by her side and read, and it is a very pleasant way of passing the time. Her embroidery is worth while, and I think there is to be found no such practice in language as reading aloud.

I recommend it to all lispers and persons with uncertain pronunciations.

While we were reading who should drive up but the Guernseas, the people who had heard our open air concert.

I saw they were about to stop, so I laid down my book and went out to greet them.

"Won't you come into the house?" said I, and Ethel rising, seconded the invitation.

"Thank you, no it is such a lovely day we'll sit here. John, you may come back in twenty minutes."

John was their very elegant driver, and after hitching the horses to the stone post, he touched his hat and walked away.

Ethel and I stood by the carriage and passed the commonplaces of the day for a minute or two and then the absurdity of the situation dawned on me. Here were our two distinguished friends doing us the honour of calling on us, and they were sitting in the most comfortable seats in a very ornate carriage, while my good wife and I stood at their feet as it were and received their call. I prefer *sitting* at people's feet, after the manner of the Jews of old, so I went into the house and brought out two dingy hair-cloth chairs, much to Ethel's mortification, and we sat down on them.

So sitting we were not more than abreast of the floor of the carriage, and we addressed all our remarks to those above who evidently had no sense of humour, for they never smiled at the situation once.

"We want to know," said Mrs. Guernsea, languidly, "whether you are living this simple life that Charles Wagner preaches."

"I haven't read his book, but our life is simple. I think we are both very simple."

I looked at Ethel and she and I looked up to the perches above us, and I know that she was thinking that we *were* very simple to *allow* a thing of this kind to happen, instead of insisting that our grand visitors come at least to the verandah and meet us upon an equal footing.

"Caroline, they are leading the simple life. Fancy! Was that why you went driving with those colored people yesterday?"

Ethel started to tell the facts in the case, but I rudely interrupted and said,

"Mrs. Guernsea, in the simple life all men are equal, but in real life there are many inequalities. The woman you saw on the back seat was Minerva, our estimable cook, while the man was James, our man-of-all-play."

I pronounced his title quickly and she did not notice the variation.

"This is the land of the free and theoretically all men are free and equal. As a matter of fact, all men are not so, but up here while we lead the simple life we try to make those with whom we come in contact believe that they are so. You met us yesterday, and yesterday I was driving Minerva and James out. Had you met us to-day, James would have been driving Mrs. Vernon and me out."

Both Mrs. Guernsea and her lackadaisical daughter accepted what I had to say in the spirit in which I wished them to accept it; as a truth of the simple life, and it was so different from their own lives that for the nonce it interested them to hear about it. Therefore, despite Ethel's reproving brow-liftings, I went on.

"In our life here in this cottage Minerva does all the cooking, because she is the best cook of the four, just as I do all the reading aloud, because I am the best reader; and Mrs. Vernon does all the embroidery, because she is the best embroiderer; and James—well, we have not yet found what James can do best, but there is one thing—his spirits are never depressed and he heartens us all."

"How curious. And do you believe that such a state of things would be possible in a more complex life, in New York, for instance?"

"Mrs. Guernsea, have you ever tried having Mr. Guernsea take your men and your maids out driving in the Park?"

"Why, no!"

"Try it, when you go back," said I. "They will be pleased beyond any doubt."

"But your servants were singing. Did not that annoy you?"

"My dear Mrs. Guernsea, it is one of the first principles of the simple life not to be annoyed. Didn't you think their voices sweet?"

"Yes, but it seemed so—so unconventional."

"The simple *lifers,*" said I, "abhor conventions that already exist. They aim to create new conventions and live up to them. We felt the need of song. Neither Mrs. Vernon nor myself can sing very acceptably. Both Minerva and James are blessed with delightful voices, so they sang for us without a word of demurring."

"Would they sing now, do you suppose? It was really very lovely."

"I have no doubt. I'll go and ask them. But—"

I hesitated. The precious old humbug, so devoid of humour, was condescending toward the simple life during a single *ennuied* afternoon. I wondered if I could make her become a disciple of it for a few short moments; hence my hesitation. I resolved to risk it, and with an elevation of my eyebrows directed at Ethel which meant "Keep out," I said:

"In the simple life anything like condescension jars. If Minerva and James consent to sing I must ask that they be allowed to sit in the carriage and that you make one of us on the ground. I will get chairs."

"Oh, no, we will stand."

And the daughter said languidly, "We sometimes drive over to the country fairs, and it is awfully jolly to stand alongside the carriage and watch the races. We have done it on the other side, too."

"Oh, I know they always do it there," said I, with enthusiasm. "Many's the picture I've seen of it."

I went in and found Minerva ironing, while James was blacking the stove.

"Will you please tidy yourselves up a bit and come out and sing for two of our friends?" said I. "They are influential city people, and they may not be able to attend the concert. You're to sit in their carriage and sing."

They were, of course, delighted, being two children, and I left them tidying up, and hurried back.

Ethel had gone into the house for something, but she soon came out with a bowl of blue berries and two napkins.

"Will you help yourselves?" said she.

Mrs Guernsea looked at her daughter, and her daughter looked at Mrs. Guernsea. They were too well bred to suggest that anything was missing, but they were evidently thinking of saucers and spoons. I came to the rescue, knowing that Ethel had entered into my madness.

"More simple life, but you don't *have* to do it. Still, berries never taste so luscious as when eaten from the hand."

I held the bowl solemnly before them, they removed their gloves, ate dainty mouthfuls of berries, and their delight in the flavour was very real.

"Oh, I wish that it were possible to do this at home."

I bowed. "It needs only for Mrs. Guernsea to do it to make it possible everywhere."

While they were eating Minerva and James came out, and if Minerva was not the best looking woman there, James was the best looking man—by all odds. I was proud of their appearance.

I was a little afraid that the Guernseas would show a certain amount of *hauteur*, but they were evidently trying to enter into the simple life, and would obey all its rules for the nonce. It was a break in their sadly monotonous lives.

"Minerva and James, these are Mrs. Guernsea and her daughter, Miss Guernsea, and they wish you to sing some of your songs."

Both Mrs. Guernsea and the daughter smiled very seriously, and I helped them to alight from the carriage.

They took their stand on the green sward, and as I would not have felt comfortable to remain seated with them standing, I left my seat, and so Ethel was the only one who had a seat at the concert.

After a little self conscious giggling on Minerva's part, a giggling that James reprimanded with native dignity, the pair began "Steal Away."

The richly caparisoned horses, to employ

"Steal away."

a term that has been faithful to writers these many years, the beautiful Victoria, handsomely japanned, the earnest songsters leaning back on the cushions and singing the plaintive song, while the fashionable Guernseas stood and drank it all in, formed a picture as unusual as it was pleasing—to me.

Midway in the second verse, even as the Guernseas had surprised us the day before, so to-day the pastor of the Second Congregational Church surprised us to-day by driving past in his buggy, accompanied by his wife.

I think he had meant to stop, but when he saw what was going on, he simply opened his mouth; his good wife opened her mouth, and I think the horse opened its mouth, and they drove by.

They had seen the simple life being lived by six persons.

James and Minerva were ready for an encore, but it did not occur to either Mrs. Guernsea or her daughter to applaud. They contented themselves by saying it was very charming.

But I felt that the labourers were worthy of their hire, and still thinking of the simple life and equality, I said to Mrs. Guernsea, in the most matter of course way:

"I wonder if you wouldn't let James take Minerva out for a short drive in return for their singing? James is an expert driver."

Mrs. Guernsea was not at all hard, and besides, I believe that she was in a way hypnotised; so with scarce a moment's hesitation she said:

"Why, certainly. You won't be gone long, I suppose?"

"Oh, no ma'am. We'll just drive around the square."

The "square" was a stretch of country road some two miles in length.

James unhitched the horses and mounted the driver's seat, but Minerva sprawled luxuriously in the seat in which she had sung. James tightened the reins and the horses started off at what is called a spanking pace by those who know.

What happened thereafter was told me in part by James, and I will give the substance of it.

It seems that he had not gone very far *when he* met John, the driver.

Naturally enough, when John saw his mistress's horses coming toward him at a pace considerably above that indulged in by himself (when he was driving for her), he was at first dumbfounded and then angered. To him what had occurred was as plain as the nose on his face. Mrs. Guernsea had been asked into the house by us, and this impudent scamp had seized the opportunity to take his girl out for a ride.

"Here, stop. Get out of that!" he yelled.

James replied by some piece of impertinence that served to increase the coachman's anger, and picking up a stone he let drive at James, but hit the flank of the nigh horse instead. He, feeling the unwonted sting, plunged forward, communicated his fear to his mate, and the two horses began to run away.

We at the house heard Minerva's familiar screams, but I set it down to a new animal that had come to her ken, as I knew that James was a capable driver.

As for Mrs. Guernsea, she was telling us something about the evening that the English primate took dinner at her house on Madison

Avenue, and she did not notice Minerva's cries.

James had been familiar with horses from his boyhood, and he would have brought the pair under his control before long, but John was a man of action, and when he saw the horses start on a mad run, and also saw a boy (Bert, in fact,) riding horseback, he yelled to him: "Lend me that horse, boy. My team is being stolen."

Bert, having just passed the run-a-way, jumped quickly from his mount and John took his place and turning the horse, dashed after James.

The run-a-ways, hearing the clatter of hoofs behind them, ran the harder and Minerva's screams steadily increased in pitch and volume.

At the first turn James guided the horses to the left and calculated that before the two miles were made they would be winded, for their gait was tremendous.

As John made the turn, crying "Stop thief" at the top of his lungs, he passed the minister who had just passed us and who was going back to our house—for as it turned out, he wished to see me.

He heard the hue and cry, and bidding his wife get out of the carriage and wait for him, he whipped up and started in pursuit.

And Bert, deprived of his horse, but unwilling to be deprived of so much excitement cut across lots, that he might see the race on its last quarter. This much I afterward learned from him.

Through it all James never lost command of the horses, nor Minerva of her voice. Her view halloo echoed over woodland and vale, and came to me from different points of the compass, and I began to feel that something serious was the matter, and now and again I had visions of bills for the repair of a carriage.

When they reached the last quarter I could distinctly hear the "Stop thiefs!" of two voices, and so did Ethel, but both Mrs. Guernsea and her daughter were of those people who can attend to but one thing at a time, and they were busily engaged in talking, the mother to me and the daughter to Ethel.

The way in front of our house is level and commands a view of the country for a considerable distance, and when James started on his last quarter, and had attained a steep hill, from where I sat (for I had insisted on bringing out chairs for us all) I could see Mrs. Guernsea's delicately made carriage swinging from side to side of the road, James sitting erect, his wrists tight against his chest and Minerva letting out warwhoops on the back seat.

Nearer and nearer they came, and at last Mrs. Guernsea heard the commotion and, putting up her lorgnon gazed in the direction from which the sound came.

"Why he is going too fast!" said she. "He will lather the horses."

I felt quite sure that the lathering had already been well done, but I did not say so.

"I'm afraid they are running away," said I.

"No," said Miss Guernsea, rising to her feet and using her own eyes, "He is running away with them. He is being chased. Hear that? 'Stop thief!' "

Across the swampy land in front of our house I saw the running figure of a boy. He climbed the stone wall that edges the road, and panting violently rushed up to us.

It was Bert. "Try to head him off," said he. "He's trying to steal that turn-out."

I did not believe it, even then. When I put my confidence in a man I don't like to have it disturbed, and I won't disturb it myself as long as there is a shadow of a chance to preserve it. The horses were running away, but it was not James' fault. I was sure of that.

A minute later the form of a man on horseback was seen cresting the hill, and after a longer interval the minister's buggy topped the same crest.

The last turn in the road is a few rods north of our house, and James guided the horses skilfully round that turn and stopped them in front of our house. This was partly because Minerva, having fainted, was no longer screaming, and partly because John's horse had stumbled and thrown him. And the minister came in second, his horse panting.

"James," said I indignantly, "what do you mean by driving those horses at such a gait?"

James, when the horses had stopped, had sprung from the seat and was now at their heads talking in a low voice to them and patting them in order to calm them.

Minerva came to herself, said "Oh Lawdy! Are we back again, already?" and climbed ungracefully out of the carriage.

The horses were white with lather, their tongues lolling out of their mouths; and the wagon was sadly scratched. It was a mortifying moment for a liver of the simple life.

"James, what happened?" said I, sternly.

And then John came limping up, with a flesh wound on his forehead and shaking his fist at James, and with his cockaded hat in his hand said to Mrs. Guernsea, "I met him trying to run away with the horses ma'am, and I tried to stop him. The cheek of him, ma'am!"

James gave a contemptuous grunt, and leaving the horses, who had calmed down wonderfully under his ministrations, he pointed to a cut on the flank of the nigh horse.

"That's what started the trouble, madam," said he, "and it was your driver *that* threw the stone."

I will say for Mrs. Guernsea, that she behaved like a thoroughbred. She was evidently a woman who reasoned things out, and she knew something of the principles of the simple life, for she said:

"Everybody meant well, I've no doubt, and the thing is all over now."

John was blanketing the sweating horses.

"Don't let it worry you an instant, Mr. Vernon," said she. "It was all an accident."

I tried to get them to come indoors and take some refreshment, for the last few moments had been more strenuous than simple, but they decided that it was better for the horses to exercise them a little more and so they drove slowly home, and Bert went after his horse which had not hurt itself, and the minister went on to pick up his wife whom he had left at the first turn.

"And it was really all your fault," said Ethel, smilingly, after James and Minerva had departed to the kitchen.

"Well, it gave Minerva something to think about and made life worth living for the Guernseas."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL FIASCO.

I am not quite sure whether I have spoken of it but by profession, trade, occupation, I am a writer. I write short stories under an assumed name and therefore the telling of the events of the summer is in a manner easy for me.

But I not only write stories; I also at times read stories, and I have been known to recite —not in an impassioned way but merely foolishly. The previous winter had been a hard one in more ways than one for both Ethel and myself, but toward the close of it the winning of a prize in a story competition had given me enough money to enable me to knock off work for all summer, and it had seemed wise to take advantage of such a chance to rest and lie fallow.

I did not mention my occupation at the start because I was afraid that readers would say, "Oh, dear, this is a story by a literary man, and nothing will happen in it." You see now-a-days when men in all walks of life write of what they have done, and make books of their writings, the people who read books have gotten to the point when they look with suspicion on a story that is written by a mere professional writer. They say, "Oh, he has done nothing but write. Let us read the book of the man who has first done and has then written."

But you who have read thus far may feel in a way friendly to Minerva, and the rest, and so I take you into my confidence and make the pun to you that won for me a rebuke from Ethel. Letters spell livelihood for me.

The Congregational Minister, Egbert Hughson, and his wife returned to us in a few minutes and after the moving accident had been discussed for a certain length of time, he came to the matter that had brought him up.

He was a smooth shaven alert, Western man of about thirty, I should say, and I marked him out as a type of the modern muscular Christian, and this guess proved to have been correct. He was an Iowan who had come East to study, had graduated from Williams and after a year in a small Iowa church had been called to Egerton through the good offices of a former class-mate.

I hope I may not be accused of egotism if I set down plainly what Mr. Hughson said. The denouement is not what an egotist would roll under his tongue. During the narration of the episode let me treat Philip Vernon quite as if he did not press the keys with which I am writing this.

"Mr. Vernon, I did not know until Deacon Fotherby told me, that we had so distinguished a man amongst us. I have read your sketches in the *Antarctic Monthly* with a great deal of pleasure, and although you use a pen name, still I happened to know that you were the author. I also understand that you sometimes recite."

I bowed assent. I could have told him the rest. He was going to say: "Now the Y. P. S. C. E. are about to give a little literary entertainment for the benefit of the library, and it would add interest to the proceedings if you would do us the great honor of reciting one or more pieces for us, or perhaps read something of your own."

I guessed right. He said it, allowing for certain unimportant verbal variations. I think it was the Y. M. S. C., instead of the Y. P. S. C. E., and instead of saying "it would add interest to the proceedings," he said it would "give the affair a literary flavour"—words of the same import.

I told him that Mrs. Vernon had come up to rest, but that did not head him off. I really didn't suppose it would. I was merely making his task a little difficult, so that he would appreciate me the more. We writers all do things like that. If I had fallen into his arms and had said, "Recite; why I'll do the whole programme," while he would have thanked me, he would have felt that he had gotten me so easily that I could not be worth much.

"Well, surely," said he, "it won't tire Mrs. Vernon for you to come and talk to us. You'll be doing a favour to your fellows."

Ah, now it was time for me to come down gracefully off my perch, and I consented to sing my little song. Altruism is the lesson of the hour, and I think I have learned it. I have been taught it often enough by various committees. Committees believe firmly in altruism. "Altruism," say they, "is the getting of a man to do something worth something for nothing." Some define altruism as "Depriving the labourer of his hire for the good of others."

I would not care to be misunderstood in in this matter. I really think that if a man has talents he ought to use them to the benefit of his fellows, but I have known so many poor strugglers in New York who, when they were struggling most frantically, have been asked by complaisant committees to *give* their services for the entertainment of the Grand-Daughters of Evolution or some other body perfectly capable of *paying* for their services that I am rather glad of this opportunity of freeing my mind.

Altruism begins at home. If you believe in it, practise it yourself, but until you have learned to think about the *needs* of the other fellow, don't ask him to think of your *luxuries.*

The upshot of the whole matter was that

I told Mr. Hughson that I would be glad to come and recite the following Wednesday (a week later), and a week later we hired Bert's wagon, and with James holding the reins, Minerva by his side (of course we could not leave her at home alone) and Ethel and I on the back seat, we drove down to the Sunday School of the church.

I wish that the good pastor had introduced me. He was a man who had moved among his fellows and who knew life and had a sense of values, while the man who did introduce me, and who shall be nameless, was insincere, shallow, a flatterer and fond of the sound of his own voice.

I can say these things thus plainly, because he is now spending a year or so in State prison for breaking the sixth commandment. (No need to look it up; it is "Thou Shalt Not Steal.")

To tell the truth, I did not want to be introduced. I had not recited for months, and I was feeling frightfully nervous. So much so that my knees wabbled, my palms were moist and my throat parched.

I would gladly have given the Y. M. S. C.

ten dollars to release me, only I didn't have my check-book with me.

This full-whiskered man, who was the Sunday School superintendent, took his long length up onto the platform and bowing and grimacing said, in a hard, flat voice,

"Ladies and gentlemen, I think that we of Egerton have always been fortunate in securing the summer services of various people who are eminent in the walks of life to which it has pleased God to call them. You may remember that last summer we had the eminent English scientist, Professor Drysden, who did some very clever card tricks for us; the year before we had Rev. Amaziah Barton, who sang a very amusing coon song for us, and I think it was the year before that that the famous Arctic explorer, whose name escapes me, entertained us with ventriloquial tricks. All these men showed in thus—er—doing things that were in a measure outside of the ordinary line of their duties, how manifold are the workings of the human brain.

"To-night we have with us a man whose name is known wherever the English language is spoken; a man whose erudite works are upon every shelf, a man who has reflected lustre upon the language spoken by Chaucer and Spenser—"

(I have never written anything under the name of Philip Vernon, so that my hearers were so far entirely in the dark as to my identity.)

"Mr. Vernon is a frequent contributor to the *Antarctic Magazine,* and those of us who feel that the month has not been well spent until we have absorbed its contents know Mr. Vernon's work as we know our Bibles.

"We have been told by a celebrated philosopher that a little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men, and there is a great deal of truth in the remark. I am not above smiling at a joke myself; no one can afford to be so engrossed with the affairs of the world as never to permit a jocose remark to pass his lips.

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, and so Mr. Vernon is going to unbend to-night, and will make you shriek with laughter by his card tricks."

Here he was interrupted by the Rev. Mr.

Hughson, who said in a loud whisper, "No, he is going to recite."

I was boiling. If I had been Mark Twain himself, such an introduction would have made whatever followed in the nature of an anti-climax. As I was to the audience simply an unknown "Mr. Vernon," it was little less than cruelty to animals.

"Oh, surely. I am sure we are all prepared to laugh heartily at the witticisms and comical actions of Mr. Philip Vernon, the great author whom I now take pleasure in introducing to you."

Ethel was well in the back of the room. She hates to hear me recite, as she is always afraid that I will go to pieces, a fear that I have often told her was groundless, as whatever else may happen, I always keep control of myself, but this evening the malapropos idiocies of the asinine gentleman on the platform upset me so that I hardly knew what I was doing when I stumbled up alongside of him.

I had chosen a poem that is not humourous in itself, but by means of perverting its written meanings and by the use of uncouth gestures the thing has served to create amusement among my friends and (when I am feeling in the mood for it) even among my enemies. But to-night I was not feeling humourous; only angry.

I bowed to the audience, bowed to the minister, bowed to the idiot who had misintroduced me, and then I began the thing, and to Ethel's intense relief (for I happened to look at her) the audience burst out into laughter before I had finished the first verse. The second verse caused them to laugh still more, and instead of keeping my wits entirely on the matter in hand I allowed myself to think of both what my audience was doing and what the man had been saying, and the consequence was what it is apt to be if a man loses grip of his work. I lost my lines. I had recited the thing dozens of times, but now not a word would come to me. I smoothed my moustache and coughed in character, and took a step or two around the platform, as if I were leading up to some business and then I bowed suddenly and walked into the cloak room, where I was followed by Ethel, and for the next two minutes I had all I could do to restrain her sobs. She was hysterical.

As for me, I was angry clear through, and when the pastor came in I started to tell him, but he raised his hand and I saw that he understood better than I could say. He grasped my hand and I knew that he was a man of feeling.

"It's all right," said he. "The audience is laughing and applauding, and they think you meant to do it. Go back and give them something else."

It was as if a flash of lightning had shown me a way of escape from a perilous lodgment.

"Do you mean it?" said I.

He opened the door a little and I could hear them clapping their hands.

"Ethel, I'll go in and tell them that story I wrote for Mazie."

Back to the platform I went, with my mind full of a nonsense story I had written for my niece.

I was received by enthusiastic applause, and heartened by their kindly feeling I told them the following story, which I called:

“The Mother of Little Maude and Little Maude.”

Once upon a time there was a little girl named Maude, and she went out a-driving in a four-wheeled carriage drawn by two four-legged horses and driven by one two-legged driver. And the dear little girl named Maude sat on the front seat by the two-legged driver and Maude’s dear Mama sat on the back seat by herself, which is not the same as *beside* herself.

And all of a sudden the horses, which had only been running before, began to run away. And the dear little girl named Maude wished to let her mamma know that they were running away, but she did not wish to alarm her too suddenly, for sometimes shocks are serious.

And the dear little girl named Maude saw a reporterman walking along the sidewalk looking for news for his paper. So she called to the reporterman and said, “I wish to speak to you on business.”

And the reporterman was agile, and he jumped on the step of the carriage, and the little girl said to him, "Please get it into your paper that the horses are running away, and I wish my dear mamma to know it. I am none other than little Maude."

And the reporterman did not know that the lady on the back seat was the mamma of little Maude, so he raised his cap and jumped from the carriage and nearly fell down in so doing, for the horses were now running madly on eight legs, and the driver was getting nervous and the reporterman went to the newspaper office and wrote: "The horses of the little girl who is none other than little Maude, are running away and it is a pretty serious business, for her mamma does not know it, and there is no telling when the horses will stop."

And they slapped this news into type, and then it was printed in the newspaper, and a newsboy took the papers and ran into the street, crying "Extry! Extry! Full account of the running away of the horses of the little girl, who is none other than little Maude."

And Maude's mamma heard the little boy, and she beckoned to him to bring her a paper. And the newsboy was also agile, and he leaped upon the step and sold a paper to the lady for a cent and then he jumped off again, for he had other papers to sell.

And the mamma of little Maude began to read the news. And when she came to the part that said the horses of little Maude were running away, she looked straight ahead and saw that it was indeed true.

And with great presence of mind she climbed over the back seat and dropped to the ground unhurt. And when little Maude saw that her dear mamma had escaped, she also climbed over the back seat and dropped to the ground unhurt. And when the driver saw that Maude's mamma and little Maude had escaped, he also climbed over the back seat and dropped to the ground unhurt.

And the two horses, who were very intelligent and who had wondered what would be the outcome of their runaway, got into the carriage and they also climbed over the back seat and dropped to the ground unhurt.

. . . . .

The ride home was pleasanter than I had expected it to be. When I had stepped off the platform after my fiasco, I understood how a suicide felt. When I stepped off the second time I felt better.

"I almos' bus' laughin'," said Minerva, as she climbed into the carriage.

"Thank you, Minerva," said I, fully appreciating both the compliment and her peril.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FOURTH OF JULY.

A week of lovely weather made us forget time. We spent our days in the open air, and Minerva spent her days practising for the concert. It was wonderful with what expedition she cooked our meals and cleaned up afterward. The meals were, if anything, more delicious than formerly. She was happy, and she could not help communicating some of her happiness to her cooking. It was not so much the thing she cooked, as the happy way she cooked it.

James was a sort of Luther Burbank in his power over plants. One afternoon I said to Ethel in his hearing that I thought it was a pity that the Wheelocks had not planted a vine in front of the house, as it would have added greatly to its picturesqueness.

He was oiling his lawn mower at the time, and I noticed that he stood up and looked at the house front and nodded his head and smiled, but I would not have thought of it again had it not been for the fact that two days after, on returning from a drive with Ethel, we both burst out into ejaculations of surprise and delight.

The front of the house, up to the second-story window, was adorned by a most beautiful crimson rambler.

I felt like rubbing my eyes. We must have lost our way. It could not be our house.

But just then Minerva and James came around the corner of the house, hand in hand. As soon as they saw us they let go of hands, and she went back to the kitchen with a guffaw that merely indicated light heartedness.

James looked up at the vine and said,

"Looks pretty nice, don't it?"

We overwhelmed him with compliments, and found out that he had bought a large potted plant in full bloom and had sunk pot and all in the earth. I had never heard of such a thing being done before, and I looked to see the roses all wither, but they did nothing of the kind. Our place looked a hundred per cent. better than it had done before, and when, a day or so later, I received a bill from a florist at Egerton, I paid it without a murmur. There is nothing like initiative, and it is worth paying for.

As I say, the days went by unheeded. We were too far from any church to attend one, but we tried to be as good on Sunday as we were on week days.

And this, by the way, is a most excellent rule for anyone to follow.

One morning I heard what sounded like pistol shots in the distance, many times repeated, and while we were at breakfast one or two teams passed us headed for Egerton.

"I wonder if haying is over as soon as this?" said Ethel. "I thought that horses were all at work in the fields."

"Not this morning, evidently," said I as another team, a two-horse one this time, went by, loaded with children.

"Oh, it's a picnic," said I, and then we heard a loud explosion in the opposite quarter from that of the last pistol shot.

I looked at Ethel, and we burst out laughing together.

"Fourth of July!"

"Of course! What geese we are. Oh, let's go down town and see what they are doing!"

"Why, we can hear it up here. That's all they are doing," said I.

"No, I've always read about Fourth of July in the country. Don't you remember Tom Bailey, in the 'Story of a Bad Boy'? Let's go down and join in the fun."

"Probably Bert's gone with his family. We'd have to walk."

"Hello! here's someone driving up to the post. Why, it's James with a two-seated wagon!"

Just then Minerva came into the room, dressed up in her Sunday best and with an assortment of colored ribbons that made her look like a fair.

"Will there be anything to do to-day, ma'am? I've made lunch."

"Where do you want to go, Minerva?" said Ethel.

"Why, James is just crazy to take me down to town to see the parade."

"Who else is going?"

"No one on'y him an' me. He brought his father's wagon."

"I guess there'll be no objection, Minerva," said Ethel. "When will you be back?"

"Oh, time for dinner."

"Yes, you may go Minerva," said Ethel, and Minerva clapped her hands. "Country ain't so bad when you know it," said she.

She went out into the kitchen, and I said,

"I have a kind of notion that James is going to invite us to go down with them. Now that would be extremely simple and would probably strike Mrs. Guernsea as being very original, but I think it will be better if I hire his rig and get him to drive us down and we'll stay there all day and take dinner at the hotel, and come back by moonlight."

Ethel took a turn at hand clapping.

"You're a great deal better than when we came up, aren't you?" said I.

"Oh, I'm all well now, and perfectly happy."

I went out and said to James,

"James, can I hire your father's team for to-day? and then I'd like you to drive us to town and bring us back to-night. We'll dine at the hotel and you and Minerva can dine where you like."

Whatever James' idea may have been, he was not above earning an honest dollar, and I offered him two for the use of his team, and a half hour later we started for town.

His father had raised the horses himself (well-matched and handsome sorrels), and under James' guidance they made nothing of the three-mile drive.

It was exhilarating to go through the air at such a pace, and we were both glad we had come, although we were both ashamed that we had forgotten what day it was.

Arrived in town, James put the horses up at a stable, and we broke up into groups of two.

I had never seen Minerva in such spirits, and it seemed to me that she clung to James' arm in a way that signified something approaching an understanding between them. What if he married her? How could we find work for him in New York?

She almost danced along, and his own stride was to a certain extent cake-walkey. We saw them enter an ice cream saloon immediately, and we knew they would be happy all day long.

There was joy in the air and we were happy. There is no question about it; as a people we are beginning to take our holidays less sadly. Everywhere laughing groups were forming on the sidewalks of Main street to wait for the parade, which was to be made up not only of G. A. R. men, but also of representatives from nearly every fire company in the county. Engines and hooks and ladders had been coming in on the railroad all the morning, and, as I said to Ethel, I trembled when I thought of what might happen in their absence. She characteristically advised me not to tremble too much.

Blue coated, peak hatted men jostled slouch hatted veterans of the Civil War and younger men in khaki hurried to headquarters to make part of the parade.

Small boys were firing off lock-jaw pistols and smaller boys were exploding firecrackers and already that morning there had been a delightful fire in a fireworks store. Thanks to the visiting firemen it had been put out before the store was entirely consumed. Every one had been intensely gratified at the excitement excepting the owner who had reckoned on having his fireworks set off in other places than his own store. There was no chance for his rockets to show to advantage. However, he was fully insured and he showed his American spirit by hiring an empty store and doing a good business for the rest of the day in selling wet fireworks at a discount. Small boys found that fifty per cent of the crackers in a package would go off in spite of their exposure to water and as two cents a package was his prevailing price they were willing to buy to the extent of their Fourth-of-July fortunes.

To our city eyes the parade was not very imposing but then again viewed as a spectacle of American manhood it was not without its interest and the company of smoothshaven, tanned cheeked veterans of the Philippine War marching sturdily along provoked tremendous cheers from many who in the nature of things must have been " antis."

All men are or ought to be expansionists on the Fourth-of-July. It is a day for fine feeling and for feeling fine. Ethel responded to its spirit nobly and she had not looked so well in years.

Once we heard loud laughter from the crowd and I instinctively said "Minerva," and sure enough they were laughing at our maid. She or James had bought an American flag and she had wrapped it around her shoulders and was rising and falling on the balls of her feet in response to some internal rhythm. All at once she broke out into the singing of Dixie in which she was joined first by James and then by the entire crowd. Those who could not sing cheered and if there were any Southerners present it must have warmed the cockles of their hearts.

There is no doubt that the most popular song in the United States today (outside of "America" which is popular by tradition) is Dixie which was composed and written by a Northerner, fused into life by Southerners and now serves to show that we are Americans all.

After the parade those of us who could made our way to the Town Hall where the Declaration of Independence was to be read and where speeches were to be made quite in the old fashioned way.

Ethel had never heard the Declaration of

Independence read. Fancy! Neither had I.

It seemed rather long but we liked the sentiments in it and it was read by a man who knew his business; the rector of the Episcopal Church.

Those who had a special pull were admitted to the platform. I worked no wires. In fact Ethel wanted to sit where she could leave the house easily if she felt faint so we were in the rear.

James evidently had a pull for he and Minerva sat on the platform. I was glad to see it because surely the Fourth-of-July is — well it is not necessary to say more.

Most of the speeches were very long and the place was very hot but there was one speech that was full of flowery eloquence that I had supposed had faded from the earth.

I am indebted to the courtesy of the editor of the *Egerton Ensign* for its text and I give it herewith so that future ages may see that, as late as the year 1903, Demosthenian eloquence had not passed away.

The speaker was a member of the State Legislature and he still clung to Burnside whiskers—or to be more accurate they still clung to him. He had a high forehead that continued unabashed over to his collar.

He rose amid considerable handclapping and advancing to the front of the platform he bowed solemnly to the multitude and then in a voice that was rich and sonorous and musical he said:

"One hundred and twenty-seven years ago to-day a nation was born upon earth.

"Ladies and gentlemen, need I tell you what the name of that Nation was? Need I say to any boy or to any girl or to any man or to any woman in this vast assemblage what the name of that nation was?

"No, ev-er-y boy and ev-er-y girl and ev-er-y man and ev-er-y woman knows that I refer to these free and independent United States of America. (Cheers).

"Born amid the thunder of warring guns (sic) and nursed upon bullets she grew to lusty childhood, advanced to sweet womanhood and in her turn, upon that other day to be held in remembrance—upon Dewey day—she became the mother of a child—a child that it is our duty to cherish and to educate and to uplift and to protect until she is as American as her mother.

"Need I say that I refer to the Philippines?" (Cheers mingled with a few hisses). He had now warmed to his work and his studied eloquence gave way to something more sincere.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we warred with England in the days of old and I remember the time when it was thought to be unpatriotic for an American to like an Englishman but I say let us be magnanimous. Let us not any longer taunt England with her defeat. Those soldiers that she sent to harry and to bully and to cripple us are dead long ago. They did what they had sworn to do when they took oath under that despicable despot George the Third. When they fought us they were doing their duty as they saw it and their dust has mingled with the free soil of this great country these many years.

"Let us be magnanimous. Why even in those dark days we were not without friends on the other side. The name of William Pitt should ever be spoken with respect by true Americans.

"Let us be magnanimous. Are we likely to go to war with England? (thunders of Nos from all parts of the house).

"No, gentlemen, we are not likely to go to war with that country. Right or wrong she was our mother and we are the greatest credit to her that ever a daughter was to a mother. From the sea-kissed shores of the coast of Maine to the ocean lapped coast of California; from the storm swept areas of the great lakes to the humid waters of the Gulf of Mexico we are the greatest daughter that a mother ever had.

"Was Greece great? We shall be greater.

"Was Rome powerful? We shall be more powerful.

"Were the Middle Ages renowned for their arts? We shall be more renowned.

"Was England strong upon sea or land? We shall be more strong.

"Has England stood for internal fair play? We shall stand for external fair play.

"This country that was mocked and taunted within the memory of men yet living shall become one, who with power to mock does not mock. She shall spread abroad her hand and wars shall cease. The oppressed in all climes shall look to her for protection and she will protect.

"I hear voices borne on the summer wind of this day and they bring good tidings to me. They tell me that the right to work for a fair wage shall belong to each man and each woman who chooses to exercise it. They tell me—these voices—that the right to stop others from working shall be taken from those who think they hold it (Hear, hear) and that the right of the rich to eternally grab is no right.

"These voices tell me that the arts have found in these United States a soil in which they may flourish undisturbed. The blood of the Italians who have come to this country, mixed with the blood of the Poles and cooled by the blood of those of the North lands, tempered still more by the sturdy common sense of the Britons, made buoyant by the wit of the French and made strong and powerful by the blood of the three century old Americans will result in a type of man that shall cause our houses to become beautiful; that shall save our forests from destruction, that shall decorate and color and cause to blossom and run to ripe fruitage all that makes life cultivated, pure, serene and lovable.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let us thank God that we are Americans; that we have been allowed to live to see this day. There are strifes and rumours of strifes in our land but everything tends to betterment, and I firmly believe that at the last we shall be found to be the chosen people of the Lord of All Things by whom all things were made."

(Cheers, and thunders of applause, in which I am free to say that Ethel and myself joined heartily.)

In fact, although the speech was over flowery, it had in it a good deal that any fair-minded man could say amen to and delivered under the influence of the deep baritone of a natural orator it was stimulating.

And then some one, with no sense of the fitness of things, rose and called on all to sing "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

The millennium is not as close as all that. We still have the question of the rights of labour and the wrongs of capital with us, and a better hymn might have been selected.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers," would have been more in the spirit of the time.

We made our way out, and as I was leaving the hall I looked back and saw the orator of the day shaking hands with James. It gave me a choky feeling, so that perhaps I was still under the influence of his speech.

I will acknowledge that I set down the speech in this place in order to make fun of it, but after all it was sincere, and sincerity makes a poor butt for the shafts of ridicule.

During the afternoon we took a drive in James's wagon, and saw something of the beauty of the surrounding country, going quite a distance on the road to Springfield. We returned to Egerton by the upper road, and I had all I could do to keep the horses under control, as that end of the town was given up to the small boy, and pistols, crackers and bombs were being exploded on every hand.

One of those hideous things that knock the romance out of any spot in which they are placed, a merry-go-round, was revolving to the sound of wheezy organ music, and the horses were of one mind with us as to its being a blot on civilization, and they proceeded to show their distaste for it to such an extent that I stopped them short and let Ethel get out. Then I forced them to stand still and watch the moving picture. They obeyed me for a few seconds and then they tore down the street. I controlled them very soon, however, and when I had stopped them I hitched them to a post on a quiet square and went back to get Ethel.

I found her by a tree, looking with amusement at the carrousel. My eyes followed hers, and the picture presented to them was eminently characteristic.

James was riding on the merry-go-round. He was astride of a small wooden pony that gave his legs a chance to look unduly long, while perched alongside of him sat Minerva astride of a giraffe. She was clinging to the neck of the beast, and for the time being she was in New York (for Coney Island is to all intents and purposes New York and your merry-go-round is the strawberry mark that identifies Coney Island).

Round and round she whirled, her eyes shining ecstatically, and from time to time she reached out her right hand and met James's left.

"We will have to keep a butler next winter," said Ethel.

Suddenly Minerva saw us and she waved her hand to us and yelled something that we could not distinguish, but I knew it was an invitation to mount some strange animal and be happy.

We shook our heads. Happiness would not come to us in those questionable shapes. When I want to be sea-sick give me the ocean and a European port as the reward, not merely sickness for sickness' sake. And Ethel is of the same mind only more so. She goes so far as to say, give her some American port and leave the sea and its sickness out altogether.

The music dwindled, the merry-go-round became less merry, and at last ceased to go round, and then Minerva, settling her ample skirts so as to cover the flanks of the giraffe, said,

"Oh, Mis. Vernon, I ain't had so much fun this summer. Better come up. It's jus' as easy."

"I'm glad you like it, Minerva," said Ethel, "but it would make me dizzy. Have you had lunch?"

"'Deed we have. Want some peanuts?"

The offer was made with such generosity of spirit that Ethel accepted. It was the Fourth-of-July, and we all ate peanuts together. I don't think that James liked it. He felt that Minerva had not been well brought up. I am sure that he would not have asked us to eat peanuts, but I don't see that any harm was done. There was no cloth spread and I have never yet come across a rule that says a lady of color on a giraffe should not offer peanuts to her mistress on the sidewalk of a New England town.

Anyway the peanuts were good and we enjoyed them.

We told James and Minerva to have a good time and to be ready to start for home at half past nine. There was to be a display of fireworks at eight, and I knew they would want to see that. It was somewhere in the neighbourhood of five o'clock when we left them and drove back to the stable.

The fireworks display was beautiful, although not lavish. I listened for Minerva's rapturous Ah's, but did not hear them, and as the circle in which we sat was not more than an eighth of a mile in diameter, I judged that for some unaccountable reason she was not there.

After the exhibition, which ended with a flight of a hundred rockets, one of which stove in a plate-glass window and so provided extra amusement for the crowd, we made our way to the stable, expecting to find James there, but he was not.

We found our wagon under a shed and we climbed in and waited, as Ethel was tired of being on her feet.

We waited until ten o'clock and James and Minerva did not come, so I asked a hostler to harness up, and telling him to keep James and Minerva if they came, we went forth to look for them.

I had a theory as to where they were, and I drove to Doncaster street, whereon the merry-go-round stands.

My instinct as to the whereabouts of the couple proved correct. There, under the flare of gasoline torches, whirled the merry-go-round, and now James was astride of an ostrich and Minerva, like Una, was riding a lion by his side and their hands were clasped in a firm, firm clasp.

I caught the eye of James and signalled, and when the music came to an end and the machine stopped, he and his lady love dismounted.

When we were all in the carriage Ethel said to Minerva,

"How did you enjoy the fireworks?"

She threw herself back in the seat with a gasp.

"Lawdy, forgot all 'bout the fireworks."

"You don't mean to say, Minerva, that you have been riding ever since we saw you this afternoon."

"'Deed we have. Rode every beas' an' bird there was."

"And what did you have for supper?"

"Peanuts," said James, rather shamefacedly.

CHAPTER XV

MORE NATURE STUDY.

"It's love that makes the world go round," said I next morning at breakfast.

"What makes the merry-go-round?" said Ethel.

"The answer to that will be found in the May number," said I. "You ought not to ask conundrums, whose answers have to be thought up. But isn't it so? Hasn't Minerva been an angel ever since James came and if she isn't in love with him what is she?"

"If that's another conundrum, I give it up, too. Do you suppose that James loves her?

"It wouldn't surprise me. Minerva is not bad looking and she has a happy disposition in the main," said I, as Ethel passed me my coffee.

"My, yes, she's a different creature from what she was when she first saw these hills. This morning she actually told me that the sunsets up here had more colors in them than they had in New York, and that they were bigger. She's beginning to take notice. I must give her a nature lesson. Something has always happened to prevent it."

"I don't think the need for it exists now that she has James. He's all the study she needs."

"Yes, but if we should come up here next summer, and James should not prove constant, it would be something if she loved the country for its own sake."

Just then Minerva came in with a dish of brains; a present from Bert's father, who sent the pleasant message that they always threw the stuff away, but he knew that city folks had queer tastes.

"Minerva, what were you going to do this morning?" asked Ethel.

"Nothin', ma'am," said she innocently.

"You mean nothing in particular," said Ethel, knowing that no impertinence was intended. "Suppose you take some of those new kitchen towels to hem and we'll go out into the fields and I'll tell you something about the flowers."

"I got some sewin' of my own to do if you'll let me," said Minerva.

"Why certainly. You know, Minerva, as long as you get your work done each day, I don't care what you do for yourself."

"No'm, I know you don't. I don't either ma'am."

I looked up hastily, but Minerva was guiltless of any attempt at repartee. She was simply acquiescing with her mistress.

Having nothing better to do than loaf, I went with Ethel to a place called the wintergreen lot, about a half mile distant, and Minerva followed after with a lot of white stuff that reminded me strongly of the day I was married. I am not up in feminine fabrics, and the thing might have been mosquito netting.

The day was hot and sultry. Hanging over Egerton in the southwest were great black, wicked looking clouds that portended thunder storms. We had so far escaped without one, although we had several times heard distant thunder and had seen a storm following the course of the river in the west.

"Shall we take umbrellas?" said Ethel.

"What's the use?" said I. "If it rains we'll probably get wet anyway, and in such hot weather as this a wetting won't hurt."

So we went unhampered by umbrellas, and after a walk through a tree-embowered road, whose beauty we were told had been marked for destruction by the brass mill, but of which destruction the happy trees were all ignorant, we reached the wintergreen lot, and Ethel, spreading a shawl, seated herself on the mossy ground, while I perched on a rock until it got too hard, when I changed to another rock.

"Minerva, do you see that little red berry in the grass?" said Ethel.

"Yas'm."

"Well, pick it and I'll tell you something about it."

I sniffed. Ethel's love of outdoor life is very real, but she is not a botanist. "She knows what she likes" in nature, but she can't tell why.

She heard the sniff and her lips came together to form a noiseless word that she bestows upon me when she thinks I need it.

Then she smiled at me and took from a little bag she had brought with her Mrs. Dana's book, "How to Know the Wild Flowers," which she had evidently found among the Wheelock's possessions.

"That, Minerva, is the wintergreen berry. Taste it and tell me what it reminds you of."

Minerva's wide mouth enveloped the dainty berry and she crushed it with her tongue. Then she beamed.

"Chewin' gum," said she. "Wish I had some."

"Well, I wasn't thinking of that, but they do flavor chewing gum with it, I believe. But could you get anything in the city as pretty as that?"

"Yas'm."

"What, Minerva?"

"Cra*m*berries."

"Yes, but they don't grow in the city. Now here's something that I never noticed before. It says in this book that 'he who seeks the cool shade of the evergreens on a hot July day is likely to discover the nodding wax-like flowers of this little plant.' Now let's see if we can find any. It doesn't seem likely that the fruit and the blossom would be blooming at the same time."

"They are, though," said I. "Found that out when I was a boy. I can never taste wintergreen berries without being reminded of a girl that —"

"Wait, Philip, we'll be back. I want to see if I can get a flower."

Ethel always cuts me off when I make any references to my lost youth. She calls them my calf love days and takes no interest in them, while I contend that some of the happiest moments in a man's life are when he roams the fields in retrospect with a girl who is always ten times prettier than anyone he ever met. I once met one of those old-time beauties and the shock was terrific. I tried to restore her features as I gazed at her, but my imagination balked at the task. She was a good woman, the mother of seven good children, but the vision of the lovely, dancing-eyed, pink-cheeked, rosebud-mouthed, shell-like-eared, dimple-chinned naiad of my early youth was gone.

From the way in which she looked at me, I felt that she had suffered a like shock. The tall, lithe-limbed, high-browed, innocent-faced, clear-eyed, light-hearted boy of sixteen no longer stood before her. Thanks be to the conventions of society, neither one of us wished that our tongues could utter the thoughts that arose in us, and we both had the audacity to speak of the jolly days of long ago, and I left her, thinking that I still considered her the little beauty of 1886, while she left me still imagining that I thought she thought me the handsome youth of the same year.

Ethel gave a little cry of delight.

"I've found one, Philip. It's just like the picture in the book."

"Why, of course," said I. "You don't suppose that they make up those pictures and expect the plants to conform to them?"

Not noticing my flippancy, she came over with two of the little flowers and held them up for me to see.

"They look like something very pretty, Minerva. What do they remind you of?"

"A pair of pants," said Minerva, with a loud laugh.

"Dutchmen's breeches, do you mean?" said

Ethel. "Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, they are like little knickerbockers, but they remind me of Japanese lanterns. Now, Minerva, the woods and the fields are full of plants like these and they all have names and each has a beauty of its own —"

"What's Dutchmen's breeches?" interrupted Minerva. She had been to the "Continuous" many times and I think that Dutchmen's breeches brought to her mind a pair of knockabout comedians.

"Do you think there are any in this field, Philip?" said Ethel.

"You have got me, Ethel. I forget each summer the names of the flowers I learned the summer before. Seems to me Dutchmen's breeches is an early spring flower."

"No, I think it comes in the late fall to tell the truth. We'll look it up."

She turned to the index, which referred her to the 37th page. Minerva looked over her shoulder in the way she should not have done and no sooner did she see the flower picture than she said,

"Oh, Lawdy, that makes me homesick. I've seen that in the park."

"Oh, surely not," said Ethel. "Let's see what it says."

"Mmmmmm," she mumbled over the early part of the description and then she came to, 'The flower when seen explains its two English titles. It is accessible to every New Yorker, for in early April it whitens many of the shaded ledges in the upper part of the Central Park.' Why, you were right, Minerva. I dare say you know more about such things than I do."

"Why, Mis. Vernon, I haven' any grudge aginst country if o'ny city is a few blocks off. My, if I could run down now an' see my folks I'd bring 'em up here to-morrer. I used to go to the park often my day out, but the city's all around it an' up here the country's so big it—oh, Lawdy, what was that?"

It was a flash of lightning, followed by a clap of thunder that told us a storm was close at hand.

"Ooh, let's get under the trees," said Minerva, her face showing abject terror.

"That would be the last thing to do," said I.

"Well, let's do it first, then," said she, all unconscious of the witticism.

The black clouds had been coming swiftly and now in the southwest we heard the noise of rain. We could see it falling on Egerton and could mark its approach up the hills to where we were standing.

The flashes of lightning grew more blinding and the thunder claps followed more and more quickly. We were in for a wetting, that was sure.

Minerva threw herself on her face in the soft moss and began to pray, "Oh, Lawd," aid she; "Don't send any messengers to take ne, out here in the country. Let me go back the city befo'—Oh, Lawdy." This break the prayer was caused by a flash and a peal at were almost simultaneous, and down in forest of walnuts below us there was a nd of riven wood.

'Dear, I wish we were home," said Ethel, wing a long breath and coming close to

Well, we are probably safer here than at . It'll be over soon."

d now the rain came down in sheets.

We were wet to the skin in two minutes. Minerva in a heap on the ground moaned and prayed and ejaculated and Ethel clung to me and shuddered at each awful peal and each blinding flash. My clothes hung in bags about me and leaked at a dozen points.

The display was magnificent, but I did not see the beauty in it that I saw when I was a boy. Then I was not frightened. Now each summer the storms seem to be worse and more awe-inspiring, and to tell the truth, so many of our friends have suffered loss from thunder storms that I would be perfectly willing to forego them in future.

The storm departed suddenly, even as it had come, and when the rumbling grew fainter Minerva rose to her feet.

A call came to us from the road. We looked up and saw James, also soaked to the skin, sitting in Bert's buggy.

At the sound of his voice Minerva gave a glad cry and started to run to him.

He made a trumpet of his hands and said, "Mrs. Vernon, you and Mr. Vernon drive and Minerva and me'll walk."

I considered a minute and then thinking

that Ethel ran a greater risk of catching cold if she rode than if she walked, I shook my head and told Minerva to run along.

We took one or two steps in the sloppy moss and our shoes spurted water.

"Let's go barefoot," said I. "It will be much more comfortable."

We took off our shoes and stockings, and for the first time in many years we walked the country barefoot. Perhaps it was Ethel's first experience of the joy. To judge from her face it was. But we picked out soft places and by the time we reached the house we were already somewhat dried, nor did we get any ill effects.

"Ethel," said I, "what was that white thing Minerva brought to sew on?"

"A wedding veil," said Ethel.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN THE LAW IS ON.

Ethel was out in the little orchard south of the house with Minerva, looking for "queen's lace." She had two purposes in mind. To teach Minerva something more of nature and to make a conventionalized design of the ground plan of the flower for use in her everlasting embroidery.

"Mis. Vernon."

"What is it, Minerva?"

"Don't the apples we have in the city come from the country?"

"Why, yes," said Ethel.

She told me of the conversation later, I being at the time fishing for trout (in all innocence) with James (who knew the law).

"Well, then, how come that apples here is so little and city apples is so big?"

"Why," said Ethel, "these haven't grown yet."

"Do they grow on the tree?" said Minerva.

"Why, certainly. You surely didn't suppose that they grew after they were picked."

"But the stems is so little that I wouldn't think they'd hold apples like I see in the grocery stores."

"Why, but the stems grow, too."

"Oh," said Minerva.

Minerva's ignorance of common things was a never-ending marvel.

"Who do you pay for these apples, Mis. Vernon," she went on.

"Why, nobody. They go with the house."

And then Minerva gave utterance to a wise remark.

"Ain't it queer, Mis. Vernon, that in the country, where you don't have to pay for apples, every man has apple trees of his own, and in the city, where you do have to pay, nobody has any?"

"Just what do you mean?" said Ethel, wishing (as she told me) to draw out Minerva's thought.

"Why, I mean poor people in the city has to pay for apples, an' in the country people don't have to pay for 'em, but it don't do no good, because they have their own trees."

"Well, but if they didn't have their own trees, they would have to pay for them," said Ethel, puzzled.

"Yas'm, but people in the city, if they had trees,—I mean poor people, then they wouldn't have to pay for apples and they could use their money for somethin' else, and people in the country has more money than poor people in the city, and they don't have to spend it on apples, because they have 'em on their own trees."

"Oh, I see," said Ethel. "You mean that it doesn't seem fair that poor people in the city, who would appreciate apples on their own trees, if they had them, have to pay for apples, while in the country people who could afford to pay for apples don't have to, but can go out and pick them."

"Yas'm," said Minerva. "I guess that's what I meant."

"Yes," said Ethel. "That must have been just what you meant. There are a great many things that we can't understand about those things, but you know that farmers sell their apples to the people in the city, and that's one of the ways they make their money."

Minerva thought a minute. "Apples on the stands in the city sells for five cents, and I've seen rows of trees up here full of apples."

"They call them orchards," said Ethel.

"Why don't they call them apples?" asked Minerva.

"No, no, the rows of trees are called orchards, and if the farmers could sell the apples for five cents apiece they would make a great deal of money, but they sell them to other men, who sell them to others, and they sell them to the men who keep the apple stands. The farmers don't get a cent apiece for them."

Minerva's mind must have been in good working order that day, for she now said,

"If the poor people in the city knew they could get them for nothing they would all come to the country. An', Mis. Vernon," said she, with a characteristic chuckle, "If the farmers knew they sold for five cents in the city they'd take 'em down theirselves and sell 'em."

Even Minerva felt that the middle man was an excrescence.

They were still hunting for the queen's lace when I returned with what was for me a fine string of trout. James had taken his string home.

"Oh, what beauties. Did James catch them for you?" said Ethel. "We'll have them for lunch." Minerva took the forked stick that held the half dozen, not one less than eight inches in length, and as soon as she had left, Ethel told me of her thoughtful conversation. She also told me that she despaired of getting any queen's lace.

"I must send to the seedsman for some seeds and sprinkle it in the grass so that we may have some next year."

"Do so," said I with the tone that fits superior knowledge. "Do so, and help fill the cell of a model Massachusetts prison. Don't you know that that's wild carrot and it's counted as big a nuisance as the Canada thistle. Don't you know we'd be fined?"

"Well, certainly farmers don't know a

beautiful thing when they see it,'' said Ethel jumping to an illogical conclusion. ''Are you sure that it is a nuisance? It grew all over the grass in Barnham.''

''Yes, and they were shiftless people in that place. Here, give me your nature book.'' I took it and soon found the page. ''Here it is: 'This is, perhaps, the ''peskiest'' of all the weeds with which he has to contend.' The farmer may think it's beautiful, but it isn't beauty so much as a living that he is after. We have to obey the laws in a civilized state like Massachusetts. It's a punishable offence to let it grow.''

''Well, I don't see how it could harm just on this place. Nobody farms it very near us.''

''No, but the wind has a way of carrying seeds, Ethel,'' said I, sarcastically. ''It was the way of the wind with a seed that first suggested rural delivery, I have no doubt. Who is that talking to Minerva?''

It was a man who, driving by, had stopped and hailed her, and had now left his horse in the middle of the road and had gone over to her.

We could not hear what he said, but we saw her suddenly put her two hands behind her back as if to conceal her string of fish.

I hurried over to the man, followed by Ethel.

"Are those trout," said the man, carelessly.

"No, they're fishes," said Minerva, in a tone of contempt for his ignorance.

"Yes, they're trout?" said I. "Why do you want to know?"

There was something in his manner that I did not like.

"Who caught those trout," said he.

I felt like saying, "I, said the fly with my hook and eye," but I really did say "I caught them. Have you any objections?"

"Decidedly," said he, his manner becoming stern and official. "I am the game warden, and this is the middle of July. The law went on on July 1st. I can arrest you."

There seemed to be something cockily pompous about this man, who was not above five feet high, but whose erectness of bearing and awesome manner made him seem (to himself) at least six feet two in his stocking feet.

So when he said "I can arrest you," I said, "And will you?" and felt quite Shakespearean as I said it. It recalled the scene between Arthur and Hubert de Burgh.

"Well," said he, seeing that I stirred not, "Perhaps it can be settled out of court. As game warden I can sell you the right to have caught those fish."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said I, "Bribery and corruption. And in Massachusetts. Well, I don't believe I care to buy the right. I went out fishing this morning not knowing of the law. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, I know that, but the point is, that if I have got to pay out money I prefer to pay it in a fine than to pay it to you for a right you can't give me. The law makes no distinction, if I know anything about laws" (and I know precious little) "and if I mustn't catch trout out of season, I mustn't catch 'em, that's all. Lead me to prison."

I said this in mock heroics and he in his turn said,

"Well, of course, I didn't mean to take a bribe. You misunderstood me. As game warden I own the fish. I represent the state and the state owns the fish, therefore I own them. Now you have caught some of my fish. I can't sell you the right to catch them, very true, but I can sell you the fish now that they are caught."

Minerva's hands had fallen to her sides and he now took the string from her, while she was off her guard, and said:

"There are six of them. This season of the year they are worth fifty cents apiece for the males and a dollar for the females."

I laughed in his face.

"My dear man, if you think I am going to pay anywhere from three to six dollars for a fish lunch you are mistaken. I'd rather throw away the fish and pay my fine like a man."

"You can't throw them away," said he, defiantly; "I have the fish and possession is nine points of the law. Did you have an aider and abettor?"

"I refuse to answer," said I.

He turned quickly on Minerva. "Did your master go out with anyone?"

"I didn't see him go out," said Minerva, sullenly. It was plain to be seen that her sympathies were not with the myrmidon of the law.

"I am not afraid of this law," said I. "I fished innocently and I am willing to pay the fine. I will also consider it my duty to tell the judge that you attempted to compromise with me on a money basis."

His manner changed in a twinkling. "See here," said he. "You're a stranger up here and you're from the city. It's easy to see that. I'll tell you what I'll do."

He walked slowly over to his wagon, holding the string of fish in front of him, while he gazed at them thoughtfully. He climbed into the wagon and seemed to be hunting for something under the seat. He soon found it. It was the whip. He applied it to the horse and the animal responded in a spurt of speed that took him out of sight before we realized what had happened.

Our fish lunch was gone.

"I'm glad it ended that way," said Ethel. I looked at her and saw that she was rather pale. "It would have been dreadful if he had arrested you."

"I think I'd like to be the game warden," said I, "if people generally are innocent of the law. But he was afraid of my bribery talk."

It may have been five minutes later that Bert drove over to the house on his way to town. He had with him another dish of brains.

"Bert," said I, "When does the law on trout go on?"

"First of July," said he.

"What's the name of the game warden?"

"Why, father. Been fishin'?" said he, with a laugh.

"Yes, but that wasn't your father that you must have just passed."

"No," said he. "That's Cy Holden." He laughed reminiscently. "Cy's a great boy."

"How is he great?"

"Oh, he's always playing practical jokes," said he.

"Much obliged for the brains," said I. "We'll have them for lunch."

CHAPTER XVII

THE STORY OF A PIPE.

I suppose that there are prettier places in the world than western Massachusetts, although I should consider it a profitless task to try to find them, but whether it arose from the beauty of the scenery or the witchery of the mountain air, certain it is that we have never stayed at a country place that exercised such a charm over us as did the rolling hills and valleys around Clover Lodge. Ethel was not less under its influence than I, and we have seen how Minerva, coming there with an evident and pronounced disgust for it, was now coming to look on it as home.

All the events connected with that summer resolved themselves in the retrospect into something agreeable. The visits in turn of the burglar, the sheriff, and the "game warden" furnished us food for pleasant talk, and our early and frantic attempts to keep Minerva satisfied did not seem as tragic when looked at from the latter end of July as they did in the happening.

It was a few days after our loss of the delicious trout lunch that we received an unexpected call from a neighbour.

It was an unusually hot night for Clover Lodge. Ordinarily a blanket was not too much, no matter how warm the day, and there were nights in July when two blankets were necessary, but this night was breathless, and so hot that a sheet would have felt like hot metal.

We had retired to rest, but found that rest was impossible. It was a night in which to deplore good circulation and wish for cold feet.

It may have been twelve o'clock; it may have been much later—we had no striking clock in the house—when we heard uncertain steps on the graveled walk. They came nearer and nearer, and at last a foot slid along the floor of the porch, followed by a reluctant mate, a heavy hand fell against the door and an over-mellow voice called out, "You 'wake, papa?"

I was only too wide awake, but I had no children, so I did not think it necessary to answer his question.

A muttering arose and then a louder query as to whether "papa" was awake.

"Who can it be?" said Ethel.

"Some one who believes in local option. I wish he'd go away."

"Papa. Papa. It's on'y me. I wan' a borrer mash."

"What does he want?" said Ethel.

"He wants a match."

"Oh, tell him to go away. He'll set the house afire."

"How can he set the house afire if he hasn't a match? It rests with me whether he sets anything afire."

I called out in as stentorian a tone as my lungs would allow me to muster, "Go away. Go home."

My voice was encouragement to the tired wayfarer.

"Oh, papa. Was 'frai' you was 'sleep. Papa, 'blizh me wi' a mash. Mine wen' out. wan'a ligh' a pipe."

I got out of bed. The moon had about ended its lighting services for the night, but I could see the form of a man sitting on the porch seat, his head swaying from side to side and as I looked he again lifted up his voice and said,

"Papa, don' you hear me? Be neighbourly, papa."

"I don't find any matches," said, I with a fine Puritanical regard for the letter of the truth. I found none because I did not look for them.

My denial of his request worked on the sensibilities of my unknown neighbour to such an extent that he was moved to tears. Amid his maudlin sobs he said,

"Pa'a, if you came to my house in dea' night an' as' me for mash I'd leshu have one. I'm kin' hearted, pa'a. On'y one mash I as' an' pa'a refuses. My pipe' gone out an' pa'a has box's mashes an' he can' fin' one."

It did seem a little like a disobliging spirit and I moved to the bureau to get one, but Ethel said,

"Don't give him one. He'll set himself on fire or else set fire to the grass. Tell him to go away."

Ethel has a horror of drunken gentlemen or even drunken men, who are not gentlemen, and I could do no more than respect her wishes.

I leaned out of the window and said in very much the tone one would assume in talking to a wilful little dog,

"Now go home. Go right home. You may catch cold if you stay here. I can't let you have a match."

"Papa, if I caught cold ni' like this I'd know wha' do with it. Mos' hot 'nough to ligh' my pipe. Goo' bye, papa. Mos' unneighbourly, papa." He rose from his seat and swayed down the walk until he came to the gate.

"Papa, I shut your gate for you. No har' feelin's, papa. Mos' unneighbourly, but I shu' your gate."

And muttering and stumbling, he went along to his home.

Ethel, with an absence of logic that must have been due to the heat, lay awake for an hour in fear that the matchless man would set fire to the house in revenge, but we did not hear from him again.

Next morning I found a pipe in the grass not far from the gate. I said nothing about it to Ethel, but when opportunity offered I showed it to James and asked him if he knew whose it was.

"Looks like Sam Adams's," said he. "Yes, there's S. A. scratched on the bowl."

I knew Sam Adams (fictitious name) to be a hard working farmer of some thirty years of age, a young married man with an adoring wife and pretty baby and with a lack of tact that I have never ceased to wonder at I resolved to restore the pipe to him. I learned from Bert that once in a while he would go down to Grange Meeting and would stop on the way back for beverages that he did not need.

The opportunity soon offered itself. I was out walking by myself one Sunday afternoon and I came on him inspecting some buckwheat that was coming along finely.

I leaned on the fence that separated us and passed the time of day with him.

He was cordial, as he always was.

"Nice hay weather," said I, a phrase that I had picked up very easily and worked a good deal.

"Yes, if it wasn't the Sabbath," said he, "or if my grass land was a leetle further away."

"Mr. Adams," said I, "I picked something up the other day that I think belongs to you."

His manner, which had been warm, became frigid as he said, "I guess not. I haven't missed anything."

"Isn't this yours?" said I, producing the pipe.

He looked me coldly in the eye and said, "I never saw that before."

I, on my part, saw something that I had not seen before. I put the pipe into my pocket, feeling that I had put my foot in it.

Anxious to make amends, I pulled out a cigar and said, "Have one."

Relaxing, he accepted it and biting off the end he put it in his mouth.

"Got a match," said I without thinking.

"Thank you, yes," said he turning away his head.

I lighted a cigar and we puffed silently for a minute or two.

"Weather's been hot enough lately, to drive a man to drink," said I. "Better take your pipe and think no more about it."

"Thank you," said he, as he put it into his pocket. And we became good friends from that hour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE FIND A PIANO.

As matters were now running so swimmingly with us, Ethel invited an old school friend of hers to come and pay us a visit.

Miss Paxton, "Cherry," as most of her friends call her, is an unusually talented woman. She can draw very well indeed, and she can play the piano in an almost professional way. Tall and slender, with a facial animation that is almost beauty, she is a general favorite by virtue of her buoyant spirits and readiness for whatever is going on.

When Minerva heard that she was coming up she clapped her hands and said,

"*My*-oh-my! I'm glad to hear she's comin'. Now we will have music."

She meant piano music, for Miss Paxton did not sing. But we had no piano.

I had not thought it worth while to get one, because Ethel, while very fond of music and with a cultivated taste for it, is not able to play. Her father thought that so many people now-a-days play the piano badly, that it was just as well not to play it at all, and he would never hear of her taking lessons.

As Miss Paxton was only going to be up a week, it did not seem to be worth while sending to Springfield for a piano. I did not know at the time that there was a wareroom in Egerton.

We talked it over, Ethel and I, and we came to the conclusion that we would help Cherry to enjoy herself without music—unless she should show an unexpected predilection for the accordeon, in which case we had no doubt that Minerva would lend her her instrument.

Cherry was coming on a Saturday, and we were to drive to Egerton to meet her.

Friday afternoon we went to call on Mrs. Hartlett, an old lady, who was in her hundredth year, and in almost complete possession of her faculties.

I feel that I owe it to Mrs. Hartlett to give some account of our visit to her, although the real object of this chapter is to tell what was happening during our absence from home.

Mrs. Hartlett was a widow, her husband having died eighty-one years before.

"Just think of it, Philip," said Ethel, as we began to descend the little hill at the foot of which Mrs. Hartlett lived with a granddaughter, a woman verging on sixty years, and almost as old looking as her grandmother.

"Just think of it; for the best part of her life Mrs. Hartlett has had a young husband."

"What do you mean?" said I, not at once seeing her drift.

"Why, the memory of her husband is that of a young man. They said he was only twenty-two when he died, and for over eighty years she has had that picture in her memory."

"It's probably kept *her* young," said I.

We found her sitting outside of her door under a grape arbour, knitting. Her face was thin and her cheek bones high and the skin was drawn tightly, but its colour had a reminiscence of the rosy shade that had (so tradition said) made her a beauty "in the days when Madison was president."

She was erect, and despite a slight trembling of her frame, she looked strong.

"We thought we'd come and see you and bring you some sweet peas," said Ethel.

"It is very good of you," said she, in a voice which though cracked had a pleasant ring of sincerity in it. "You are the Vernons, are you not?"

I was surprised that so old a soul should be enough interested in things to know who transient summer people were, but I suppose it was that very interest in things that had kept her faculties unimpaired.

As I looked at her I felt proud of New England. Perfectly self-possessed, abundantly able to hold her own in conversation, respected by all and self-respecting, she was a type of that native cultivation that made the hill towns a source of strength to the nation, before the coming of steam cars that drew the young men and maidens from the hills and sent them forth to carry New England traditions to the West.

"Yes, so you've heard of us."

"Oh, yes, the young people come in and keep me informed of all passing matters," said she, talking slowly and evidently choosing her words with care.

"Pray be seated," said she quaintly, and we took seats under the pleasant grape arbour.

Suddenly a canary, whose cage hung in the centre of the arbour, burst into a roulade that had something of the bubbling ecstacy of a bobolink's note.

Mrs. Hartlett looked up at him and smiled.

"He is a source of comfort to me," said she. "He sings as long as the sun shines. Last winter he was mute for upwards of a week, and I feared that I was going to lose him, but it was only that he was moulting. When his new coat had come he began singing again and in spite of the fact that he has no mate he is happy."

Two mateless creatures and both of them happy. It's all in the temperament.

"How do you like it up on these hills?" said Mrs. Hartlett.

"Very much," said Ethel. "It is so quiet and there are so few houses that it's a pleasant contrast to our noisy, busy New York life."

"Child, I remember when this was a busy community, too," said the old lady. "When I was a young lady of eighteen, we had a singing school here and Dr. Lowell Mason used to come from Boston every two weeks to teach us, and there were two hundred young people of both sexes who gathered in the seminary to learn of him."

"You had a seminary here?" said I, astonished, for the district school of the present day is the only school in the neighbourhood, and it does not accommodate more than twenty-five.

"Indeed we did; a seminary and a college for chirurgeons. Dr. Hadley was the best chirurgeon of his time and young men from all over New England used to come here to learn of him. Times have changed, but if the houses have fallen away and the people gone the country has grown more beautiful."

"How do you pass the time?"

"With my magazines and my young friends. I have taken *Littell's Living Age* and the *Atlantic* ever since they started, and they keep me abreast of the times, and the young people are very good. Two years ago they clubbed together and gave me a cabinet organ. I cannot play it myself; my fingers are too stiff, but the young folks come in and play me the old tunes I knew when I was a girl—"Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes," and many others that are never heard now, I suspect. Mr. and Mrs. Hayden are especially kind in coming to sing to me but all the young people are very thoughtful."

It was not until later that I realized that the "young people" she had specified were considerably over fifty. But she was right. Youth is a relative term.

"Do you walk about much?"

"When my rheumatism permits of walking. My knees are somewhat rheumatic but it is no more than I might reasonably expect at my great age. I shall be one hundred years old on the 16th of September next if the Lord spares me."

There was a gleam of pride in her eyes as she said this. She was striving for a goal.

We rose to go soon after, fearing that we might tire her if we stayed too long.

"Oh, don't go yet," said she, half rising and putting out her mitted hand. "You have barely come. I want that you should see my cat. I am quite proud of my cat. She was given to me by a play actor who spent last summer here. I was brought up to consider play acting an abomination to the Lord but we live and learn and this gentleman was an honest, God-fearing man although he has been a play actor ever since his youth. I cannot recall his name. Names have a way of going from one. It is one of the defects of age with which we must be patient.

"Pussy, pussy," said she, calling in falsetto.

Whether in answer to the call or merely because Her Independence decided that it was time for her to come out and stroll about I cannot say but at that minute a most magnificent Angora jumped heavily from a chair in the sitting room (as I saw from my seat under the arbour) and walked out to us. She walked over to Ethel and sniffed her dress and passed her by. Then she came to me and sniffed my trouser leg and arching her back she rubbed against me and began to purr in tremendous fashion, quite like a young lion.

The old lady laughed cheerily.

"She always shows a *penchant* for gentlemen," said she. "You never will guess her name. The play actor named her."

"Lady Macbeth?" said I, quite at a venture.

"Why, my sakes," said Mrs. Hartlett. "You are right. You must be a Yankee. You know we are said to be able to guess almost anything."

"Well, if I'm not a Yankee born I'm one in spirit. My ancestors came from Connecticut."

"The 'land of steady habits.' Stop, Macbeth. Don't let her sharpen her claws in that fashion. I call her Macbeth half the time although she has a much better character than Macbeth had."

"So you read Shakespeare?" said I.

"I never did until in recent years. The pastor we had a few years back, in '65, I think it was, told me that there was much in him that would repay me and I have found it so. I sometimes think that we of the last century were narrow. It came about from our isolation. The easier modes of getting about have made us better acquainted with our world neighbours."

I signalled to Ethel and we again rose.

"Do you feel that you must go?" said Mrs. Hartlett. "I thank you for coming and I am sorry that I cannot offer you something in the way of refreshment but my granddaughter has gone to town and I find that it does not do for me to try to handle cups and saucers and glasses for my old wrists are tired of service and they play me strange tricks."

We shook hands with the old lady and as we came away she said:

"When you can find nothing better worth doing come and see me."

"Well, she is the real thing," said I as we got out of hearing.

"Ninety-nine years young and growing younger every year. Think of her hobnobbing with a play actor. I wonder who he was."

"Why, but aren't actors all right?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, they are if they are, but you don't know what it meant for her, brought up as she had been, to acknowledge that an actor might be a good man. It showed great independence of mind."

"What poise she had," said Ethel.

"She could stand before kings."

"And the kings might well feel honoured."

We walked slowly back as Ethel was trying to see how many kinds of wild flowers she could pick. Mrs. Dana's book had had an effect upon her she had not anticipated and I was afraid that she was going to become a botanist and talk about pistils and stamens, and things.

I believe she had picked twenty-five different "weeds," as the farmers thereabouts called them, when she stopped and stood erect and listened.

"Where's that piano?"

"Is it a piano," said I, not willing to believe the evidence of my ears. We were about ten rods from our house and there is not another house nearer than a quarter of a mile and no piano within a half mile.

"It certainly is a piano and in our house," said she.

What we had heard were preliminary chords and now to a bang-bang accompaniment we heard the pleasing lyric, "Hannah, Won't You Open That Door," and recognized the voice as that of James.

"First a crimson rambler and now a piano," said I. "I suppose he planted a few keys and the piano sprang up quickly."

"Well, what does it mean?"

"It means," said I, "that, however it may have happened, we have a piano in the house and Cherry can play when she comes."

We now noticed wheel tracks, some of them on our lawn and we knew that James had not worked a miracle but that the piano had come to the house by *very* human agencies. A broken plant showed where a horse's hoof had toyed with it.

Our appearance on the path was the signal for the music to stop and Minerva came to the door perfectly radiant.

"It's come, ma'am. The pianner has come," said she, her eyes dancing with delight.

"Well, who sent it?" said I.

James had come out.

"Where did the piano come from, James?"

"I do'no,' sir," said he. "I found it here when I come up to the house."

"Why, it come in a wagon," said Minerva. She looked me in the eye and then she gave one of her chuckles.

"Say, Mist. Vernon, didn' you order it?"

"No," said I.

She clapped her hands rapturously. "Then you can thank me for it, Mist. Vernon and we'll have music when Miss Cherry comes. I half knowed he didn't mean it for here but I wanted it."

"What do you mean, Minerva? Tell us what happened."

"Why, it was this way. I was moppin' de kitchen an' I see a man pass the winder, an' I thought maybe it was tramps, an' I clinched the mop an' got ready to run, an' a man comes to the back-kitchen door an' asks where he's to put the pianner.

" 'What pianner?' says I. 'Why, the on'y pianner we've brought,' says he, 'for Mr. Werner.' "

" 'Vernon,' says I. 'Well, Vernon,' says he, 'Where'll I put it,' says he, and I says, 'Right in the parlour,' and I walked thoo to show him, and he went out to the other man an' they unstrapped it an' like to ha' broke the porch floor gettin' it in, an' they set it up an' unlocked it an' then they gev me the recippy to sign an' it was written on it, 'Mr. H. Werner,' but I thought as long as the pianner was up an' you'd like it I wouldn't tell 'em they'd made a mistake, an' I signed the recippy an' they drove off."

I looked at Ethel.

"It's fate," said she.

"Do you know where it came from?" said I to Minerva.

"No, sir. From that away."

"Oh, there's only one place," spoke up James: "It came from Hill's in Egerton. He rents 'em."

It was a time when quick thought would be a good thing. "James," said I, "you go right down to Hill's and tell him that he sent a piano to me by mistake but that I want to keep it, and that he'd better send another to the Werner's before they make a kick about it."

"Won't we have fun when Cherry comes?" said Ethel after the others had gone and we stood looking at the case that had the potentiality of so much pleasure in it.

"Minerva is a treasure," said I.

CHAPTER XIX.

TH' OULD SCUT.

I have made mention of the fact that during the haying season horses were difficult to get. We generally relied on Bert, but he was not always able to supply us with a means of conveyance to town. I had counted on him to bring Miss Paxton up, but I had neglected to say anything to him about it and our telepathic communication was out of kilter, for he never felt my desire, and so it fell out that when at four o'clock of Saturday afternoon I realized this and Ethel and I went down to his father's to get him to harness up, we learned that he and his father were over in the "east lot" getting in some valuable hay—the weather threatening thunder storms—and that we could not possibly have either of the horses.

Here was a pretty how-de-do.

It was ten minutes after four and the train came to Egerton, three miles away, at 4:58. We might walk down and hire a livery team but even at that it would require speed.

In my dilemma Bert's mother suggested that we try Pat Casey.

"He lives in the little red house beyond the ruins of the old church," said she, "and you may be able to hire his horse."

Across the fields to the little red house we hurried. A short, lithe, nimble-footed man was tossing hay in front of his house. We climbed the last fence and stood before him.

He looked up and greeted us pleasantly, his eyes twinkling with what looked like suppressed mischief.

"Is this Mr. Casey?"

"I'm Pat Casey. Divil a hair I care about the Misther," said he, leaning on his rake and bobbing his head at us.

"Well," said I, hurriedly, "We want to go down to Egerton to meet a friend who is coming on the 4:58. Can you let us hire your team?"

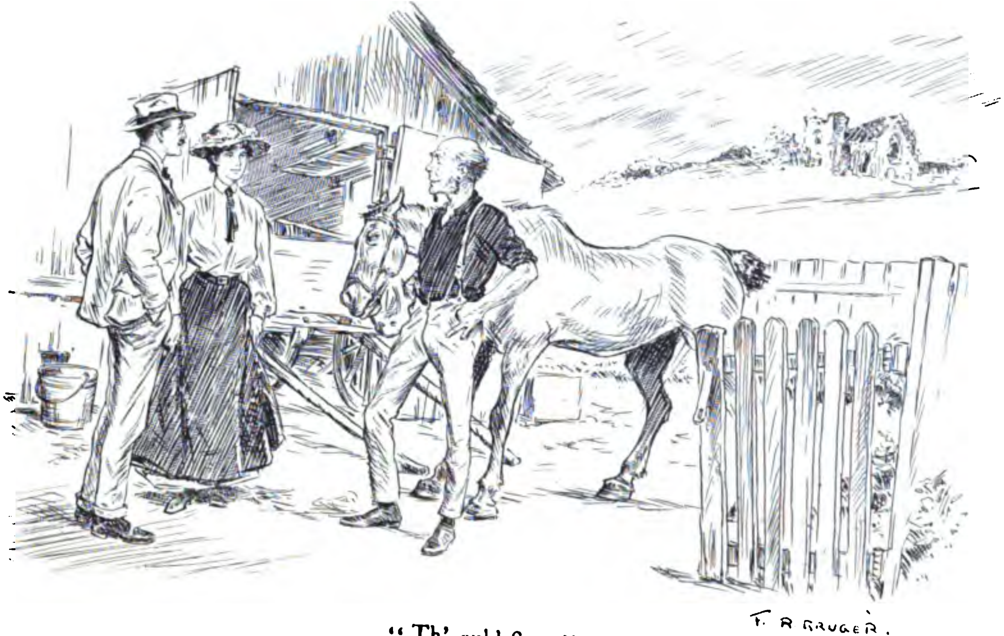
He threw back his head and laughed.

"Is it hire? Divil a hire. If ye dare trust your legs in me caart you're welkim to use me ould scut of a harse—bad scran to her."

The "bad scran" was delivered with a laugh that robbed it of all animosity and setting his rake against a tree he led the way to a tumble down barn that sheltered a more tumble down dirt cart, and a yet more tumble down horse. It certainly was an "ould scut," whatever that is. It was blind in one eye; its back seemed trying to show Hogarth's line of beauty in the form of a deep curve, and its four legs stood not under its body but at obtuse angles to it, as if it had been staggering with a heavy weight long enough and was now about to break in two in the middle.

And yet when Pat slapped the animal on the flank and spoke a word or two to it the horse whinnied and pricked up its ears and looked intelligently out of its only seeing eye, and I judged that it would not be cruelty to animals to take it.

But when I saw the harness, which was eked out by strings and ropes, when I saw that the cart was literally a dirt cart and that we would have to sit in hay, I decided that we would use the horse only to get us down there



"Th' ould Scut."

and that I would then hire a livery team to bring Cherry up and would pay Pat to go back in it and get his horse.

"You're sure the horse will be able to pull us down?" said I to Pat.

"Hell, yes," said he, genially, looking at Ethel as he spoke. "Sure 'tis gentle as a kitten. Ther' wife there 'd make a pet of um if she had him. Not afred of the trolley caars. Egorry when he was a colt there was not wan finer annywhere. He'd be a hell of a fine harse now, sorr, on'y fer a shlight weakness in his back. He's the bye'll carry you down on time. Don't be afraid of the whip, on'y let him see it before you use it an' thin he'll know what to expect."

All the time he was talking he was harnessing the "scut," as he chose to designate it, and I, to save time, ran the cart out.

"Don't you want to go back, Ethel?

"No, it'll be loads of fun to go down this way," laughed Ethel, and immediately Pat gave her an encouraging nod of the head and said, "Me leddy, take life as it comes. It's a dam site betther'n findin' fault."

I would have resented these strong words addressed to Mrs. Vernon if he had been somebody else, but his oaths were as harmless and void of offense as the ejaculations of a sunny tempered child. I am not sure that he would have understood the nature of an oath.

He helped Ethel in with Irish politeness, handed me the dreadful looking reins, and taking off his hat he said:

"Don't spare um. He's strarng as a—as a harse, th'ould scut."

Then he slapped the horse again on the flank and with a "To hell wid ye," addressed to the animal, he went back to his haying and we started on our journey to town.

The horse could go but I soon learned that he did not regard the whip as anything at all. I showed it to him before using and he pricked his ears each time I showed it, but that was merely as much as to say, "I understand what you mean, but I'm doing my best as it is."

The cart was not easy, but Ethel was out for a lark and she considered our passage in this vehicle in the nature of a lark. For my part I was ashamed of the rig.

"Remember that you are to dress for dinner," said she.

"Does this look like dressing for dinner?" said I with a look at the impossible beast in front of me.

"Well, but Cherry won't see him, and I am sure that she is always used to seeing men dressed for dinner."

"If I know Cherry Paxton at all she will be glad to be free from all conventions for a short time. I will take her into our room and I will show her my suit all laid out on the bed and I'll ask her to try to realize how I'd look if I wore it, and I will be comfortable in an outing shirt and sack coat as usual."

Further conversation along these lines was stopped at that moment because the beast stepped on its foot, or did something equally absurd, that caused it to limp along on three legs for a few yards and then stop.

I got out and looked at its hoof—somewhat gingerly, for I am not used to horses. It did not seem to be suffering pain but it looked at me out of its well eye and seemed to say, "This is where I stop."

I climbed into the cart and I tightened the reins and clucked and applied the whip, but to no purpose. The horse looked around at me in a languid way, but he refused to budge.

"Nice," said I, looking at my watch. "Quarter to five, and we've got at least two miles to go yet. I wonder how Pat starts him."

"He used languages," said Ethel suggestively.

"Thanks. So he did."

Once more I pulled on the reins, clucked and plupped and whipped (not viciously, but ticklingly) and once more the horse did not move.

"To hell wid ye," said I suddenly, and it worked like a charm. The old beast took up his ungraceful trot, and we jolted along to the station.

I had meant to hitch the horse on the outskirts of Egerton and walk up to the station in style, but as we neared the Congregational Church I saw that it lacked but two minutes of train time, and so setting aside pride, in my anxiety to meet our guest, I whipped him up the incline that leads to the station, and just as we drove up to the platform the train pulled in, and out of the drawing-room car came Cherry, pretty and pink and smiling. She waved to us and then, when she saw our equipage, she shook her own hands in a manner indicative of delight, and not waiting for me to come and help her, she ran down the steps of the car and hastened over to us.

"How lovely," said she, kissing Ethel, but refraining from kissing me. "Are we to go up in it?"

"Hell, yes," said I, thinking of Pat.

Ethel frowned at me and explained to Cherry the bad influence under which we had been.

"No, we're going to get a team to take us up. We only took this because we would have missed the train if we had walked."

"Don't do any such thing," said Cherry. "It will be perfectly delicious to ride up in a cart, and in that lovely new-mown hay. Mmh, how sweet it smells."

"No evening clothes for me," thought I, and I was right. Cherry had come up to have a good time and to forget that such a place as New York and its exactions ever existed, and when she had settled herself in the hay with her traps all about her and her trunk for her to lean her back against, we started out for the return trip, while Ethel told her of our good luck with the piano.

I will confess that the inhabitants of Egerton eyed us curiously, for Ethel did not look like a carter, and Cherry was very modish, and I was not in the costume of a teamster. And we had to stop at the grocery store to get lemons and things.

Altogether these were not pleasant moments, and I was glad when we turned our backs on Egerton and began the ascent of the hills.

"Th' ould scut" was a good walker and he went up the hills as if he smelt his dinner ahead of him.

"Think of it," said Ethel. "The harness hasn't broken yet!"

"How perfectly delicious to think of it," said Cherry. "It really looks as if each moment would be its next. How was he ever ingenious enough to tie it all together in that fascinating way? He *must* be a character. I do wish the horse would stop. So you could start him again."

"No, you mustn't wish that, for my profanity is really wicked, while Pat's is as natural to him as leaves are to trees. It's part of his growth. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go down and hear him swear after dinner."

We had come to a level place about a quarter of a mile in extent. The view of the town from which we had left was well worth looking at, and I was just on the point of stopping the horse that we might see the little city perched on the side of a hill and surrounded by green farms and wide expanses of woodland, when "th' ould scut" stopped of its own accord, began to tremble violently and then broke into a gallop. So quickly did he start that we were all pitched out. By great good fortune not one of us was seriously hurt, although Ethel scraped her wrist, and Cherry bumped her head. I escaped unscathed, and telling the others to follow I started after the horse.

I soon gave up the chase, however, and sitting down on a bank I waited for the others.

"What shall we do? Go back and get a

team, or walk. It's a mile or more," said I, when they came up.

"Oh, it's perfectly lovely to walk," said Cherry, and as Ethel said she felt able, walk we did.

We had gone perhaps two-thirds of the way, looking at every turn for a wrecked cart and a broken legged horse, when we heard the rattle of wheels and saw the horse coming back after us, guided by Pat, himself.

"Oh, 'tis the devil's own pity, sure it is," said he when he saw us. "Sure, he had the blind staggers. Why didn't ye bleed him?" said he.

"How could I bleed him when he ran away?"

"Oh, well, that's arl he needed," said Pat. "He come runnin' in the door yaard, an' me woman says, 'they're kilt,' says she. And I whips out me knife an' cuts his mout', an' he's arl right. Ye'd oughter have bled him. Ah, it's a hell of a bad job that it happened ye. Were ye hurrted?"

We assured him that it was all right, and would have continued on foot, but he said the horse had needed bleeding and that she was as fresh as a colt now, and he helped the ladies in, gave me the reins, slapped the animal's flanks as before, with the same command as to his destination, and we drove home in triumph, leaving him to walk.

CHAPTER XX.

A MUSICAL TRAMP.

WE wanted Cherry to play, but we did not feel that we ought to ask her to do it; she would be tired, after her journey, and piano playing to her was no novelty.

But when, after dinner, while passing through the sitting room, on our way to the veranda she ran a harmony enticing hand over the keys as she walked by the piano, I could not help saying,

"Don't you feel like following that up with the other hand?"

She laughed, and sitting down at the piano she said, "Why, certainly. What shall it be?"

"Oh, we leave that to you," said Ethel. "Play what you like and you'll play what we like."

"Is Grieg getting old fashioned?" I asked.

"I never inquired," said Cherry. "I don't believe in fashions in arts. I liked Grieg, and Schumann, and Beethoven, and Mendelssohn, and Wagner, and Johann Strauss when I was a child, and so I'll always like them. And Grieg is always fresh. What shall I play—'Anitra's Dance'?"

"Yes, do," said Ethel. "I never hear that without thinking of Seidl and Brighton Beach and the throngs of doting Brooklyn women who didn't go to hear the music, but to see Seidl. But it was beautiful music—when the roar of the surf didn't drown it."

Cherry found the piano stool at just the right height, and without any airs or graces beyond those which were part of her endowment, she started in to play. The windows were open and the music and the moonlight, and the hum of the insects, and the landscape became indissolubly blended, and I blessed Minerva once more for the truly "Puss-in-boots" service she had rendered to the "Marquis of Carabas."

The dance ended, Cherry turned around on the piano stool and said,

"Minerva chose a very nice piano."

There was a sound of steps on the porch

and the shadow of a man fell across the square hallway. There was also a subdued rap on the door post.

I stepped to the door and found a tramp standing there. He was the typical tramp of the comic papers; unshaven, dusty, blear-eyed, unkempt, stoop shouldered, ragged, unprepossessing.

"What do you wish?" said I, irritated at the interruption.

He hesitated a moment.

"I'd like a glass of milk," said he, huskily.

"Well, go around to the back door and the girl will give you one. Don't you want some meat?"

"Thanks; I don't care if I do," said he, wiping his mouth as if my invitation had been a bibulous one.

He went around, and I returned to the sitting room, where Cherry had started another piece.

"Do you have many tramps?" asked she when she had finished.

"Not many. They are too lazy to climb the hills. I think he is only the third one this summer. He was awful looking. Did you see him?"

"No," said Ethel and Cherry together.

"What a life! Probably not a wish in the world but for food and drink."

My moralizing was cut short by the return of the tramp. In his right hand he held a sandwich and with his left he was wiping milk from his moustache.

As he passed the window he beckoned to me, who was sitting by it.

I supposed that he wanted money, and went out.

"Say, boss," said he, "I'm pretty far gone, but you didn't set the dog on me, and I want you to ask that young lady in there a favour."

"What is it?"

"Ask her to play the 'Dance of the Dwarfs' in the same suite—'Peer Gint.' "

"Sit down," said I, and felt as if I needed a seat myself.

The oafish tramp sat down on the porch seat, and I went in and told Cherry what the tramp would like to hear.

Surprise showed in her face, but quite as a matter of course she went to the piano and began the lumbering, humourous dance.

In the middle of it I could hear the tramp laughing gutturally, and when she had finished it he clapped his hands and said,

"Beg pardon, but I'm much obliged. That's one of the funniest pieces of music that was ever composed. Say, boss, will you step out a minute."

I stepped out. He had risen and was evidently going.

"Boss, I used to be one of the second violins in Seidl's orchestra, but—well,—that's how. I was go'n' *by* here, for I had had som'n' to eat at the last house, but when I heard 'Anitra's Dance,' gee! it brought back the good old days when I was doing the only thing I ever cared for, fiddling; and I thought I'd ask for some more, and then I didn't dare until I'd been around to the kitchen and braced up. Thank the young lady for me."

He shuffled out to the road.

"You wronged him, Philip," said Ethel when I returned. "Think of his knowing 'Peer Gint.' "

Cherry wiped her eyes and broke into a chorus from "Iolanthe."

CHAPTER XXI

WE MAKE HAY.

SUNDAY it rained until late in the afternoon, but at that time a westerly wind sprang up which rapidly dried things, and enabled us to go out for a sunset walk.

"This is a place in which to do nothing but be happy," said Cherry to Ethel as we stood on top of our favorite rock and looked up the valley for miles and miles, watching belated and feathery clouds fly across it, trying to catch up with the rain clouds that had all day long swept by.

"That's what I felt when I first came up," said Ethel, "but I'm beginning to feel so strong now that Philip has sent for a lawn tennis set, and James is going to mark a court, and you and I can play against Philip."

"Yes, and while we're waiting for it to come," said I, "we'll have to pitch in and give our next-door neighbour a spell of work at hay-making."

"What's a spell of work?" asked Cherry.

"Why, it's falling to, and helping your neighbour this week, and next week he falls to, and helps you."

"Oh, how delicious. And do you know how to make hay?"

"Anyone can learn how in a single morning. First you cut it, then you toss it, and then you gather it. It's as easy as lying."

"I'm afraid I'll never learn it," said Cherry demurely.

"I was reading somewhere," said I, "that in Germany, where they learn to be economical from the beginning, the navy is supported—or else it's the army is supported entirely on the hay that Americans would leave in the corners and the by-ways. I've no doubt that the Emperor William commands his people in a heaven-sent message to get out their nail scissors and cut the little blades in the remote corners that nothing be lost, and as 'mony a mickle maks a muckle,' he pays for his army out of the hay crop that would become withered grass with us. Now to-morrow, when we go over to help the Windham's, you must remember to account each blade of grass as equal in value to any other blade."

"What will Mr. Windham say to women working?"

"Well, the idea! Ethel. Did any Yankee farmer ever object to women working? And isn't it better to work out-of-doors than to work indoors? I'd rather you lifted forkfuls of hay than have you lift heavy mattresses and furniture and things, and it's better to rake hay than to sweep floors."

"When Philip gets on a topic like that, the best thing to do is to just let him talk it out," said Ethel. "Don't say a word, and he'll burn up for lack of fuel."

"Which is a logical remark," said I.

"But it will be too perfectly delightful to go out like Boaz and glean."

"You may possibly mean Ruth," said I.

"I do. I always mix them up. Boaz seems like a woman's name. Do you think it will rain to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," said I, with a glance at the west where the sun, a red ball, was disappearing in a cloudless sky, "will be a good hay day."

And to-morrow was. We rose and breakfasted early and found when we looked at the thermometer that it was already 78, but there was a west wind blowing to temper the heat.

"They're already at work, aren't they?" said Cherry as we started out, the women clad in walking skirts and shirt-waists and broad-brimmed hats, and I bare headed and outing shirted.

"My dear child, they have been at work for the last four hours."

I had told Windham what to expect, and when he saw us coming he said, "That's right. The more the merrier. You'll find rakes there by the fence."

I told him that I would mow a little, as I had done it when a boy.

"Good work," said he, and let me take his own scythe while he drove a loaded wagon home.

I started in at a field that they had not intended to attack until after lunch, but Windham said it would make no difference.

Ethel and Cherry raked as if they were sweeping, and I am not sure that their money value could have been represented by any undue use of figures. I vaulted the fence and began my fell work, taking care to keep close to the edge and demolishing every last blade of grass. I also found that my method of attack spared a little mouthful of grass at each stroke, and when I had gone down the length of the field and had stuck the point of the scythe in the earth twice, and had cut the end off of a stone, and had lunged into the fence, I determined to rest a minute and try to recall the proper way in which to hold the scythe.

The way back was easier, as I was now one remove from the fence. I poised the scythe in such a manner that I reaped what I had before spared, but found, upon looking back over the path by which I had come, that I had spared a few inches in each swathe. I seemed to be unable to make a long, clean sweep. And my back felt like breaking and I was sweating in a manner unbecoming a gentleman.

That, however, did not worry me at all,

as I reflected that on my father's side I was the first gentleman that had appeared in America for nine generations—all the rest had been of the bone and sinew of the nation.

When people talk about pride of ancestry in my hearing, and their pride of ancestry is based on the fact that they have had fine blood in their veins for generations, I inflate my chest and tell them about my maternal ancestors, the Durbans. Not a man did a stroke of work for eight generations, and they lived in cities and looked down on country folk in a manner that was as aristocratic as could be. When my mother married my father, who had been born and bred a country boy, all the Durbans held up their hands in holy horror and said that my mother would never draw a happy breath again.

Yet she went on drawing one happy breath after another, until she died, and my father knew his first unhappiness when she departed.

But when I meet people who laugh at lineage and genealogy, I do not speak of the Durbans at all. I say, "Yes, pride of lineage is foolish. The Vernons have been plain country folk ever since they came over in 1639, and not one of them was ever celebrated for anything—not even for his wickedness. They've just been Yankee countrymen, and so, of course, pride of ancestry is a foolish thing."

Whenever you hear a man laughing at pride of ancestry, you may be sure that his ancestors were no better than my fathers were. But if he is always talking about his ancestry, depend upon it, he has something back of him as good as the Durbans, and his forbears looked down on farmers.

We worked until the whistles at Egerton blew for noon, and I had by that time devastated quite a patch of grass.

Windham had been busy in other places all the morning, and when he came to look at what I had done he made no reference to the thrift of the Germans. He looked at the regular patches of spared blades that were holding their heads high amidst the blades that had fallen so bravely, and said,

"How would you like to drive the rake this afternoon?"

I blushed and said that I believed that would be a change of work.

I did not laugh at the somewhat amateur raking of Ethel and Cherry. Haymaking is an art, and beginners learn better by encouragement than by ridicule.

We had brought our lunch, and we picnicked under the spreading branches of an oak, and found that we were feeling "pretty good." And we had six red arms to our credit—four of them pretty.

CHAPTER XXII.

"DING DONG BELL."

THE week passed so quickly, with our hay-making and our getting over our hay-making and our pleasant walks—we did not attempt to drive out again behind "th' ould scut",—and the attractive meals that Minerva cooked and the pleasant music that Cherry found within the piano, that when Friday came, and Cherry asked me if I had found a team to carry her down, Ethel said,

"It's all nonsense, your thinking of going back. Philip, she says that she hasn't made any plans at all, beyond thinking of going to Bar Harbor in September to visit her aunt."

"Well, then, Cherry, it will be downright unkind in you to ask me to hunt up a team yet awhile. Just stay on until the haying season is over, and we can go down behind a real horse."

"Well, of course I'm having a perfectly

delicious time," said Cherry, putting her arms around Ethel's shoulders affectionately, "and I'd much rather stay than go, but it seems like—"

"It doesn't seem like anything at all," said Ethel, "except that we want you to stay. And, besides, we want you to meet Ellery Sibthorp."

"Ellery Sibthorp," said Cherry with a laugh. "Is that his real name?"

"That's his real name, the one he writes under, and Philip asked me to ask him up. He's all alone in the world and is struggling to make a name for himself."

"Mercy, I should think he had one ready made. Ellery Sibthorp. It's as valuable as Rudyard Kipling."

"Wait till you see him," said I. "He's poor as a church mouse and as clean as a whistle, and as good as gold."

"Oh, I'm simply *dying* to see him. When does he come? And how will you get him up?"

"Egerton livery, this time. And he's coming Monday. So you see, if you were to go to-morrow, you wouldn't see him."

"Tell me something about him. Of course I'll stay. How old is he? Is he married?"

"Oh, no. I guess he's about twenty-eight, and he's one of the great unrecognized. Good, but different, so he's got to wait."

"Hasn't he had anything accepted?"

"Oh, a few things, but not enough to make him hopeless of success."

"Oh, is he *that* type?"

"A little. If he finally takes the world by storm, he won't be among those who are surprised."

"And what do *you* think of him?"

"I? Oh, I think he's young and can afford to wait, but I guess he's one of the real ones. It won't do him any harm to wait."

"That always sounds so merciless," said Ethel. She and Cherry were sitting on a settee under a maple. She turned to her friend. "Half the time he lives on next to nothing, and yet Philip says that it will do him no harm to wait. He may starve before the world finds him out."

"Even if he does, he'll be the happier in the world to come," said I. "But don't look for a sad-eyed, posing, long-haired, hollowcheeked poet. Sibthorp sticks to prose, and he has a sense of humour that keeps him sane and satisfied and hopeful. I really think that if he were to be tremendously successful now that life would lose something of its savour. He feels in a vague way that he belongs to the line of those who have had to toil and wait before recognition came, and the thought is not distasteful."

"Will he read to us, or will he be like you, and never read anything of his own?"

"Oh, he'll read, if you press him—"

Just then we heard moans that we had supposed were never to be heard again, and Minerva came running out of the house.

"Oh, Mist. Vernon, Miss Pussy has fell down the well."

"Not really?" said Ethel, jumping up from the settee. "Oh, Philip, you must get her out at once. We never can drink the water again."

"Are you sure she's there, Minerva?"

"'Deed I am. I had the top off to fix that chain that got unhooked agin, an' she must have jumped up awn the edge and then fell in. She'll be drowned, sure."

"Where's James?" said I, hurrying through the house.

"He's gone home."

"Well, you go get him. I'll fish for the cat, but he'd be more likely to get her if he went down. Hurry!"

Our drinking water was pumped out of the well, that was under the kitchen, by means of an endless chain furnished with rubber buckets, and while the well was some thirty feet deep, it would not be much of a job for a man used to it to go down and rescue the cat, supposing that its nine lives held out until he came. I did not think of going down, because I cannot swim, and a single false step would have meant drowning for me, and the husband who throws away his life for a cat has a false sense of values.

Minerva rushed out to within bawling distance of James, and I lighted a candle and lowered it by means of a clothes line for about ten feet.

"I see her! She's swimming!" I exclaimed, and then the candle went out and I drew it up.

I then tied an eight-quart pail on the line and lowered that, and when I felt it hitting water I called to the cat reassuringly, hoping that it would have sense enough to get inside of the pail. I pulled and felt the weight of the cat.

"I've got her," said I to Ethel and Cherry, who stood, interested spectators, at the kitchen door.

"Oh, how fortunate," said Ethel.

"Yes, Minerva needn't have called James. My, the cat must be water logged. She's heavy."

I pulled hand over hand, and at last the pail was near enough for me to reach down and taking it's bail, pull it over the edge.

It was full to overflowing—with water.

"Where's the cat?" said Ethel in astonishment.

"Cat's gone back."

I lowered the bucket again, although I felt that it was time thrown away. While I was trying to attract Miss Pussy's attention Cherry, looking out into the moonlight, said,

"Here comes James."

And a minute later he came in. He had not quite reached home when he heard Minerva's agonized calls, and came in obedience to them.

"Think you can get her, James?" said I.

"I guess so. Light the lantern, Minerva," said he, and Minerva sprang to the cellar stairs and brought out a lantern which she lighted promptly.

"Think she's drowned, James?"

"No, sir, cats hate water, but they can swim all right."

He stepped into the woodshed and came back in a minute with a coil of new clothes line. This he doubled and then tied it around his waist, asking me to hold on to the end of it.

The lantern he fastened to the other rope's end.

"Keep yourself braced," said he. "I wont fall, for I've often been down there to clean it, but if I do, you can pull me up."

"Try *not* to go, James," said I, looking at his two hundred pounds, and at the slender rope.

We wrenched off the case of the pump, and stepping down he was lost to sight almost immediately.

I lowered the lantern and he made his way to the water.

"Do you suppose the cat slipped?" I asked Minerva.

"I reckon she was thirsty."

"Well, she won't be thirsty when she comes out. What do you find, James?"

"A scrubbing brush."

"Ooh," said Ethel, and "Ugh," said Cherry, but Minerva said,

"Lawdy, I wondered what I had done with that."

"Where's the cat, James?"

"I'm afraid she's sunk. She ain't here. That's certain."

"That's too bad. Coming up?"

"Yes, sir. No use looking any more. She's gone down."

I began to pull in the rope, and James began to ascend. Suddenly there was a splash and simultaneously I was pulled forward, and almost went into the well myself.

Minerva shrieked and so did Ethel and Cherry, but James's voice rose assuringly.

"All right. Missed my footing. My, but this water's cold."

We could hear him spluttering.

"Here, lend a hand, all of you, at this rope," said I, and we all began to pull.

Of course it meant that next day James would have to pump the well dry and get the poor little body of the poor little cat. What a lot of excitement and suspense and labour over one smallish cat. Indeed, what a risk of life, for James might easily have hit his head when he fell.

We hung back on the rope like sailors, and James climbed higher and higher, and at last his black hand came up and grasped the edge of the curb, and a moment later, dripping and shivering, he stood upon the floor.

And then we heard the voice of a cat. I rushed to the well and looked in, but the sounds did not come from there. They came from out of doors.

"That sounds like her," said James.

"It's her ghost," said Minerva. "She's comin' to ha'nt me."

Illogically enough we all pictured the cat standing outside of the door dripping water.

I opened the door and in walked Miss

Pussy, as dry as a bone, and began to rub against Minerva's skirts.

"Why, she's dry," said Ethel.

Minerva burst out laughing. "My, I clean forgot. I shut her out doors before I began moppin'."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ELIGIBLE.

WE were sitting at dinner Monday night, all of us wondering why Ellery Sibthorp had not come. We had heard the whistle of the train on which he was to have come, and we had allowed more than time for the livery team to come up, but it was now seven, and we had given him up.

"I'm afraid he missed the train in New York. I wish I'd walked down to the station."

"Will you please tell me," said Ethel, "how your going down to Egerton would have prevented his missing the train in New York?"

"Well, I was thinking that perhaps he missed the hackman at Egerton."

"It's too perfectly awful of him," said Cherry, "seeing that I stayed over just to meet him."

"The disappointment will be his when he sees you," said I, and at this both of them asked me what was the matter with my wits.

"Have you had an infusion of Irish blood?" asked Ethel.

"I'm thinking of how inhospitable I was not to go down to the train."

There was a knock at the kitchen door, and Minerva, who had been removing the soup plates, went out to open it.

A light-keyed, pleasant voice said to her,

"Can you tell me where the Vernons live?"

"Right here, sir. Come in won't yer?"

In through the kitchen came a light step, following Minerva's heavy one, and as she opened the door into the dining room she said to us informally.

"I guess this is the man you was lookin' for."

"Oh, I didn't know you had company," said Sibthorp, setting down his grip and removing, or trying to remove his hat. His hand hit it and it fell to the floor, and when he stooped to pick it up he felt flustered, and put it on again, his face turning the colour of a peony.

Ethel rose from her seat and said,

"Mr. Sibthorp, you surely haven't walked up? May I present you to Miss Paxton?"

"Certainly," said the poor fellow. "That is, I did, and I'm happy to meet everybody."

He had taken off his hat again, and I now found his hand and gave it a hearty shake.

"This is your house for the time being, Ellery, old man," said I, "and Miss Paxton is one of the family, also. We call her Cherry, but it isn't obligatory. Now hang your hat up in the hall, and I'll show you where you can find a pitcher and basin, and nobody's the least bit stiff in this house, so you can feel as happy as if you were by yourself."

I led him out of the room, and by the time he had explained how he had not seen any hack, and had come up by a short-cut that a farmer told him about, he was feeling more in command of himself. It is really a tax on a man's self possession to be shown through the kitchen and brought face to face with a strange and exceedingly pretty young woman, and I would not care to have anyone think that Sibthorp was one of those hopelessly diffident fellows, whose every contact with their fellow beings is agony.

When he came back to the table he went over and shook hands with Ethel, and sat down in his seat quite himself.

He was a good looking fellow, reminding one a little of the pictures of Robert Schumann. His eyes were deep-set and his lips full, and if he had been born twenty years earlier his hair would have been long. The spirit of the times is against excessive hair. The cow boy had it and stuck to it and—the cow boy is going. Whether artists and literary men pondered on the fate of the cow boy, and in order to save themselves, cut their hair, or not, I am not prepared to say, but it is a fact that if all the hair that is *not* in these United States were to be placed end to end it would encircle the earth time and time again—which beautiful thought I dedicate to the statisticians.

"What bracing air you have up here," said Sibthorp. "Why, I came up the hills like a streak, and I was getting so that a short walk in the city tired me. Isn't it a great place?"

"You're inoculated soon," said Cherry. "There's something in the spirit of this place that makes people stay on and on. I was only invited for a week, and now they can't get me to go. It'll be the same with you."

"Ellery," said I, "the motto of this place is going to be 'All hope (of getting away) abandon ye who enter here.' You see, Ethel and I were getting mortally tired of our honeymoon, which had lasted four years, and so we began to invite people up here to relieve our *ennui.*"

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, to say that?" said Cherry; but Ethel only laughed.

"It's a fact. At first Minerva (she's the lady that ushered you in) contributed daily to our amusement and excitement, but now she's getting to be semi-occasional, and so we're thinking of our friends who don't hate the country, and you may be in quite a congested community before you have a chance to go. You play tennis, don't you?"

"I used to when I was a boy."

"Oh, don't say that. We're all boys and girls up here. We expect to set up a court to-morrow and there'll be four of us to play."

"Have you written much lately?" asked Ethel.

It was curious to see the extra animation that came into Sibthorp's face at her question. Tennis had left him cold, but the mention of the works of Sibthorp roused him.

It is the fashion to laugh at this tendency in writers, but I have a dim suspicion that the engineer is roused to greater interest at mention of some engineering problem he has solved, than he is at the ordinary topics of the day, and so it is with all.

"Had something accepted last week," said he. "It had been everywhere, and if it had come back again, I would have burned it up, but the *Atlantic* took it, and the only reason I didn't send there at first was because I thought it wasn't good enough."

"How proud we must be."

"Well, it's funny, but as soon as the *Atlantic* took it, I went and got my carbon copy and read it, and I thought it was pretty good, and when it had come back time before, I had read it, and thought it was rotten."

"And when it's printed, there'll be as

many opinions of it as it has readers. But you're progressing if the *Atlantic* takes you up. Doesn't it make you feel sorry to see the goal?"

"No, sir. *Now* I won't be happy until I've written a serial for the *Atlantic,* or some one of the big magazines."

"Is that the way it works?" laughed Cherry. "The more one gets, the more one wants?"

"That's the way ambition is built up," said I, "acceptance by acceptance."

"What a place to work in this must be," said Sibthorp, as he allowed Ethel to replenish his plate.

Cherry laughed. "Yes, you ought to see the way Mr. Vernon works. 'A poem in the morning, a short story in the afternoon, and an essay in the evening."

Sibthorp turned his glowing eyes on me. "Good boy. Are you really working?"

"Miss Paxton sees fit to jest," said I. "I'm afraid I haven't done as much as I might."

"You couldn't do less, Philip, seeing you haven't done a thing since you came up," said Ethel.

"All the better for winter. But don't let my example influence you, Sibthorp. I'll turn you loose with pens and paper, or my typewriter, and you can enrich the literature of this country every minute, if you want to. Only, if you take my advice, you'll give *literachure* the go by, and stay out doors for a week or so."

"I'll work out doors, but I must work," said he, his eyes shining.

Ethel laughed. "A night up here will cure that. You'll be content to loll by to-morrow."

"Why, I wrote on the way up," said he.

"Really!" said Cherry. "What did you do with it? Hand it to the conductor by mistake, for your ticket?" she added saucily.

"No, but do you know, whenever I ride any distance, I feel that I must write something because money spent on tickets seems money thrown away."

"Dear me, is it a poet speaking or a thrifty Yankee."

Cherry spoke to him as if she had known

him all her life. I did not know but he would take offence, but he was looking at her when she spoke, and that made all the difference in the world. Ethel said one day that Cherry's eyes apologised for whatever daring might be in her words.

"I'm very thrifty. I have need to be," said Sibthorp earnestly, and as I knew that his income for the preceding year had been something in the neighbourhood of four hundred dollars, I flashed a warning signal to Cherry, and asked him to do the thing that would make him the happiest.

"After dinner suppose you read us the stuff you've been writing."

"How disrespectful," said Cherry. "Stuff!"

"Why, if it wouldn't bore you?" said he, smiling at Cherry.

"Lovely! Perfectly delicious!" said Cherry, and Ethel said,

"It'll make me think I'm living in a literary atmosphere once more. Since Philip won that prize, he's simply vegetated. I don't like it a bit. What's your story about?"

"It's a sort of fable. I call it the "Two Altruists."

We had coffee served out under the maple, and while we were drinking it Sibthorp, after apologising for not being a better reader, began it.

"Once upon a time—"

"Wait a minute," said I, "Here comes Minerva. She doesn't want to listen, but it'll go better if we wait until she has gone."

She had come for the cups and saucers, and she took Ellery's coffee before he had had a chance to touch it, but no one noticed, he least of all, intent as he was upon disburdening his mind of his fable.

I make no bones of producing it, because we all liked it so well that it seems as if a larger audience might be pleased at its whimsical tone.

" 'Once upon a time,' " he began again, " 'there was a man whose chief happiness came from seeing others happy. He was indeed an absolute altruist.

" 'Now it so fell about that this altruist was a professional writer, and wove tales for the magazines, and one day, being in a happy mood, caused by his having given his last crust and his last shirt to a professional beggar, he wove a story for a competition and was so fortunate as to receive the capital prize of $1,000.00.' "

("I was thinking of you, Philip, when I wrote that," said he.)

" 'For a time his joy was unbounded, but after a while the thought came to him of those in this world to whom the money would mean so much more than it did to him, and he essayed to put the thousand dollar bill into his side pocket and walked along the highway, pondering upon the best disposition to make of it.

" 'And in his abstraction he missed his side pocket altogether and the thousand dollar bill fluttered through the air and fell to earth, where it lay in plain sight, if the man had but looked behind him.

" 'Now after the altruist had gone the space of a mile he put his hand into his pocket that he might pull out the bill, and feeling its tangibility, plan its disposition with more concreteness.

" 'And the bill was gone!

" 'Then the altruist fell to skipping and jumping in great joy. "For," said he to himself, "no matter who finds that bill it must perforce make him happy; therefore I have added a happiness to some fellow mortal, a happiness that is scarce ever vouchsafed to one on this world of ours where money is not to be had for the mere picking up." And he ran along the highway full of the joy of others' lives and stirred to seraphic emotions by his altruistic temperament.

" 'Now in that same town there lived another altruist, whom Howells or Tolstoi would have loved with exceeding ardour. His form of altruism was not so much sharing his joys with others as taking from them their sorrows. As the former added to the joys of life, so he subtracted from the sorrows of existence or converted them into his personal joys, and he always went about looking for those with long faces that he might foreshorten them.

" 'And it happened that he, walking along the highway, came upon the thousand dollar bill.

" 'Now, it was a time of roominess in his pocket, which had scarce felt the weight of a minor coin for many days. And a thousand dollars would have brought luxuries to his house for a twelve month, he being unwedded.

“ ‘But when he picked up the bill and saw its denomination he fell into loud lamentation and raised his voice to its highest pitch, saying,

“ ‘ “Woe is me, for in this town some poor fellow is mourning this night at the loss of what may have been his all.”

“ ‘And this second altruist had a voice of penetrating quality, for in his younger days he had been an auctioneer, and his words went through the stillness of the night and came to the ears of the other altruist, walking his happy way to his home.

“ ‘And at once the first altruist turned about and hastened to where the voice came out of the night, saying,

“ ‘ “Weep no more, brother, for I am coming to comfort thee. It matters not what has happened to thee, I have words at my tongue’s end that cannot fail to give thee good cheer.”

" 'And after a time he came upon the second altruist swaying and moaning and waving the bill in the air, and he said to him,

" ' "Brother, what calamity has descended upon thee? Hast lost thine all?"

" 'And the second altruist said,

" ' "No, but one of my brothers in this world has lost this great piece of money, and I cannot sleep this night for grief at the thought of his sorrow."

" 'And the first altruist stared at him in wonder, and said,

" ' "What condition of affairs is this and what is the constitution of man? For I had attained to perfect joy at the thought that you (or another) had found my money, while you have been rendered miserable at the thought that I (or another) had lost it. In what way can we be happy together?"

" 'And even as they held converse a robber came along, and snatching the thousand dollar bill made off with it.

" ' "Ah," cried both together, raising their voices in joy, "now we can be happy again, for beyond peradventure this robber who took the money needed it, else he would not have taken it, and while we do not condone his dishonesty, we rejoice at his prosperity.”’”

He finished and looked around for an approbation that was freely given him.

“How did you ever think of such an idea?” said Cherry, and I could see that he had impressed her.

He looked at her and began to explain very seriously how the idea had come to him, and she listened just as seriously.

“It's another edition of you,” said Ethel to me with a smile, and I recalled certain conversations that we had had in years gone by, when she was deeply interested in the “how” of “literary endeavour.”

She flashed a signal to me that I could not mistake. I looked at the handsome pair seated under the maple, he full of the animation of self interest, she animated by a sympathy that might well become something greater, and instantly I began to look ahead and foretell what propinquity would do quite as if they were characters in a story of mine, and I intended that they should fall in love with each other.

He had four hundred a year or less, and ambition, but she had beauty and—enough to support two comfortably while ambition was becoming fruition.

A new interest had been added to life at Clover Lodge.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAT CASEY CALLS.

THE next day we were all awakened by one of Minerva's morning songs, but it was such a morning—the air was so bracing and fragrant, the sun so mellow, and yet not too hot, that not one of us felt that the song was out of place, and all four met on the porch a good half hour before breakfast.

"Well, Ellery, this is a great day to work. How would an epic do and we'll delay luncheon a half hour, so that you can finish it."

Ellery looked over the waving, billowing meadows. Then he looked at Cherry, rosy and vibrant with animation.

"I believe it's going to do me more good if I lay off for a few days and get charged with some of this air."

We all shrieked gaily at him.

"We could have told you so last night," said Ethel.

"I did tell him so," said I. "Here's where you store up mental energy, but you might as well try to write at sea as to try to write up here. Let's go put up the tennis net."

"Oh, all right," said Ellery. "I *was* going to ask Miss Paxton if she wouldn't show me around the place a little. Have we time before breakfast?"

"Yes," said Ethel, "but don't go too far. Minerva's going to have griddle cakes and real maple syrup and they need to be eaten hot."

When the two had sauntered off I said to Ethel,

"You're a romantic soul with your griddle cakes. Don't you see those two? In the language of the day, Ellery is stung."

"Imagine him married."

"It would be the finest thing for him that ever happened. He might amount to something with a wife to look after him."

"It doesn't *always* work," said Ethel, saucily.

"Better four hundred a year where love is —" I began.

"Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith," concluded Ethel.

"Something like that. Four hundred a year with love is a large order. She'd better wait until Ellery is famous. But perhaps we'd better not hurry them along. She's interested in him because he has talent and is unrecognised, and he's interested in her because he has talent and she recognised it, but I don't believe but that you could buy him off with a mess of pottage—"

"Or some griddle cakes. There's the bell now. You call them."

I called "Breakfast's ready," although the two were out of sight, and my call was answered by an "Arl right. I'm just in time."

"Who was that?" said Ethel in some dismay.

"Sounded something like 'th' ould scut,'" said I, for by that name our friend Casey had come to be known.

It proved to be he, bare-footed and hatless, coming to us across the fields.

"Good marnin', 'tis a hell of a fine day."

"Yes, it is," said I, "although your language is somewhat strong."

"No harrum intindid," said she, looking at Ethel with a pleasant smile. "Ye can't make an insult out of a hell or two a day like this. I t'harght that perhaps your woman would like some blue berries for breakfast th' day, an' I brarght them up. They're picked this marnin', an' the dew is yit on them." He held out an eight quart pail filled to the top with tempting berries.

"How much are they, Pat," said I, putting my hand into my pocket.

"Who's insultin' now?" said he, with a growling laugh. "I'll sell no *prisints* this yair. 'Twas a hell of a bad ride ye had th' other night, an' I tould me ould woman I'd git square wid ye one way or another, an' this is the way. They're dam fine."

"They certainly are," said Ethel, unconsciously seconding his oath.

She went into the house to get a bowl to put them into and just then Ellery and Cherry came up.

"The top of the marnin' to ye," said Pat, bowing to Cherry, as he had bowed to Ethel. "It's easy to tell why it's a fine day."

Cherry was unconscious enough to ask him why.

"Sure, wid you out how could 't help ut."

"Now will you be good, Cherry?" said I.

"You've kissed the blarney stone," said she, with a lovely blush.

"Sure I have, but I knew beauty before that."

His tone was not offensive nor did Cherry take offence. It was truth buttered with flattery and that's as good as cake.

Ethel now came out with the bowl, and the big "bloomy" berries, damp with dew, were poured into it.

"It's glad I am you're up here," said Pat, as he walked down the path. "Neighbours is neighbours, an' phwin you're passin' an' need restin' it's fine buttermilk me ould woman'll give ye, an' glad of the chance. Good marnin' to yez."

"Good morning, Mr. Casey, and thank you very much for the berries. They're the best I've seen," said Ethel.

"They're dam fine, that's a fact," said he. "But none too good for the likes of youse."

We all went in to the griddle cakes, but before Minerva began to fry them we had heaping plates of blue berries and even as the burglar had been impressed by them so were Cherry and Ellery.

"I thought," said Ellery, "that your New Englander was always on the make."

"Well, in the first place, Pat is not, strictly speaking, a New Englander," said Ethel, "and in the second place, they're *not* always on the make by any means, as we've often found out since we came here. Neighbourliness is never sold and there's lots of neighbourliness here."

"The very fact that neighbourliness is not sold makes it the more necessary for country people to get a good price for the things they do sell," said I, sententiously.

"It's a great place," said Ellery, with enthusiasm. "I believe I will try tennis this morning," he added, somewhat irrelevantly, although in justice to him it should be said that his eyes had rested on Cherry's exuberant beauty before he said it.

"I'm a good deal of a duffer at it. I imagine you play a strong game, Miss Paxton.

Will you be my partner in a four-handed game?"

"D*ee*-lighted," said Cherry, showing her pretty teeth.

"The writing of the epic is indefinitely postponed," said Ethel. "You are all alike, you men."

"Wait till next winter, Mrs. Vernon," said Ellery. "I'm going to make myself a storehouse of energy and I dare say Vernon's doing the same thing."

"Well, you'll need some of it this morning," said I. "At tennis Mrs. Vernon and I are the strongest up here." He looked doubtful. "It's a fact—we are introducing the game."

"Mr. Sibthorp and I expect to make a pretty strong team," said Cherry.

Ethel's eyes sought mine. And found them.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CONTINUOUS WEEK END.

ETHEL was reading a letter, Ellery and Cherry having brought the mail up from the post-office. Ellery had now been at Clover Lodge a fortnight and during that time we had fished (for bull heads this time), had gone on long tramps, had read to each other, and had played many a game of tennis, and while we could not say that Ellery was in a fair way to propose to Cherry, he was hard hit.

The glamour of the place had appealed to him and neither he nor Cherry had any intention of going back until we went in September.

Minerva had shown signs of homesickness, and one day we had let her and James go to Springfield to spend the day, and after her return she had said,

"City ain't what it was," which we had

taken to be a most encouraging sign. Nearly three months out of New York and still happy. Who would have predicted it?

Ethel dropped the letter in her lap and said, "What are we going to do, Philip? This letter is from Madge Warden, and she and Tom are going to a place in Vermont to try it on the recommendation of a friend, and Madge asks if it would be convenient to stop off on the way up instead of on the way back. She says that if we could find a shack for them here, Tom wouldn't care to go to Vermont."

"Well, of course, have 'em come."

"Yes, but she wants to come this Friday for over Sunday, and we've invited the Benedicts for over Sunday."

I thought a minute.

"It would be great to have them all here, because they are so congenial, but unless you and I gave up our room and slept in hammocks—"

"Why couldn't you and Ellery sleep in hammocks and then I could let Madge share my room with me and give the Benedicts the spare room?"

"And what would become of Tom?"

"Oh, that's so," said Ethel. "I'm afraid we can't do it."

"They's a sofa in the wood-shed," said Minerva, who had been dusting the sitting room and always interested in household problems, had stopped at the open window outside of which we were sitting.

"So there is. Good for you, Minerva," said I, in spite of a warning look from Ethel, who says that at times I am too colloquial with Minerva.

Ethel and I went around to the wood-shed to look at it. It was across two rafters, but with help from James, who was busy in the vicinity, I got it down.

"So I'm to write and tell them all to come? Isn't this going to be a good deal of a drain on your pocketbook, Philip?"

"We can't do worse than go home broke and then I'll begin again."

"'Easy come, easy go,'" quoted Ethel, with a half sigh.

"Don't you want 'em to come? Will it be too hard on you?"

"No, no, we'll make them understand it's a picnic, but you will have to hustle in the fall."

"Well, hustling never killed anybody, and we'll have a summer to remember. It's a lucky thing that James is so handy. He can help in the kitchen."

And so the sofa was brought into the house and dusted, and the Wardens were implored to come up and told to take the same train that the Benedicts were coming on, and the haying season being practically over, we were able to engage Bert's double team and his three-seated wagon, and Friday afternoon we all went down to meet them.

No, not all. We left Minerva behind. She and James had to prepare a dinner for eight.

There was no accident on the way down, and we arrived at the station several minutes before the arrival of the train.

At last we heard the whistle below the bridge and then it steamed in and we took up our station around the parlour car and prepared to greet our guests.

But the only one to get off was a well-set-up young fellow in irreproachable apparel, and he did not belong to *us*.

"Why, of course, they never would have taken a parlour car. The Benedicts might, but the Wardens wouldn't," said Ethel, and we looked down the platform to see whether they had alighted. But they had not. Our guests had not come.

"Isn't it too provoking," said Cherry, sympathetically to Ethel.

"It really is," said Ethel. "That dinner will be stone cold if we wait for the next train."

"When is the next train?" asked Ellery.

"In two hours," I replied. "They won't come to-night, though. Something happened to Tom at the last minute and he asked the rest to wait and they waited. We'll get a telegram saying so. Everybody obeys his will always."

The irreproachable stranger had been walking around as if he was looking for somebody. He now approached me with uplifted hat.

"Would you be so good as to tell me whether Mr. Vernon lives near here?"

"I am Mr. Vernon."

He coloured, stammered and said.

"I am Talcott Hepburn, and I am afraid that I've been led into an unpardonably rude act."

"Are you the son of Talcott Hepburn, the art collector?" said I.

"Yes,—oh, you know him then," said he, relieved. "My friend Tom Warden took the liberty of bringing me along with him—only" —here he paused. "He has missed the train."

I understood in a minute. Tom Warden is an artist, and he is the soul of hospitality. He knows Ethel and me as well as he knows his father and mother, and it never had occurred to his simple but executive soul that there was anything unusual in his asking a friend to come along without letting us know. Of course, if we could accommodate eight we could accommodate nine. But now it looked as if we would have but five.

I presented Mr. Hepburn to the rest of the "family." He was about twenty-four or five, good looking, smooth shaven, of course, with a sober expression that might have hidden a humorous temperament, but did not. It evidently did not strike him that there was anything *whimsical* in his having arrived ahead of the man who had invited him to be the guest of a stranger. He did see, however, that the act itself was one that might be misconstrued, and he began to explain the case to Ethel, who said at once,

"Why, Mr. Hepburn, Tom's friends are our friends, and the more the merrier. I'm only sorry they missed the train."

"He was busy with a picture that some one had bought and which he wasn't satisfied with, and I dare say he missed it on that account. He was coming with a Mr. and Mrs. Benedict, and I was to meet him on the train. I was a little late myself, and just had time to step aboard, and they missed it."

While he was talking I was looking at the telegraph office intending to step over there—it lay just across the track—to enquire whether there was a telegram for me. A messenger boy came out, mounted a wheel, and started across the track, bound for the road that leads up to Clover Lodge.

I ran and intercepted him.

"Have you a telegram for Philip Vernon?" said I.

"Yes, sir," said he, dismounting and pulling the telegram out of his side-pocket. "I was just go'n' up to your place."

"Saved me a dollar, didn't it?" said I.

"Yes, sir, and lost me ten cents."

"Here's the ten cents," said I, as I signed for the telegram.

"It's collect, sir," said he; "forty-five cents." I paid him and I opened the envelope.

"All missed confounded train. Be good to Hepburn if he caught it. Will come on next train. Wait for us. Tom."

A most characteristic telegram in every way. It's superfluity of expression, its thought of Hepburn and its command to wait, were all as like Tom Warden as they could be.

"There's nothing to do *but* wait," said I when I had shown the telegram to the others.

"The dinner will be spoiled," said Ethel ruefully.

"Let me walk up and tell Minerva to wait," said Cherry, and Ellery enthusiastically seconded her motion.

"Why, it seems too bad," began Ethel.

"Not at all. We're just going to take a walk," said Cherry, and they started, well pleased at the turn of affairs.

I knew young Hepburn to be a millionaire in his own right and I knew that Ethel would worry at having him see the make shifts to which we resorted, but I was rather amused at the prospect myself. We had already shown the simple life to two New Yorkers and now we would show it to some more.

We asked him if he would not like to ride around Egerton and see a typical Massachusetts town and he said he would.

"Do you know," said he to Ethel, "I held back about coming up in such a very unconventional way, but you know how compelling Tom is, and he said he would explain it all before I was even presented, and so I came. And then to have him miss the train. It was awkward."

"Simply one on Tom, Mr. Hepburn," said I. "Our house is one of those affairs that can be stretched to accommodate any number of people if they themselves are accommodating."

"Well, you know," said Mr. Hepburn, "I

might find a room at the hotel." Perhaps he had thought he was not accommodating.

I knew that Ethel was wishing that he *would* find a room at a hotel, but there was no hotel. She was beginning to think how *much* less a sofa would be than the bed he was accustomed to sleep in when he was at home. But when you are picnicking the only thing to do is to have a good time and forget that there is such a proverb as "Other times, other manners."

Our ride was pleasant and it did not seem anything like two hours when we heard the whistle of the train at South Egerton, and drove rapidly to the station.

Hepburn offered to stay in the carriage and mind the horses, and I accepted his offer, although I knew that Ethel thought it making a very free use of a millionaire. Not that Ethel is snobbish, but she has never used millionaires much.

The train came in and this time I took up my place by the ordinary cars, and soon saw the quartette moving along the aisle.

Tom looked out of the window and saw Hepburn sitting erect in the front seat of the picnic wagon holding the unmistakably farm horses, and he exploded into laughter that we outside plainly heard.

"Hello," said he as soon as he emerged. "Broken him in already. Well, here we are. Better late than never. You know the Benedicts?'

"What a question," said Ethel, kissing in turn Madge and Mrs. Benedict.

"But we didn't know Mr. Hepburn," said she saucily.

"Oh, well, he's harmless and I'll bet he came out of it all right. Hello, Crœsus. Stole a march on us, eh?"

"Crœsus" raised his derby, but good driver that he was, kept his eyes on the horses.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WE INVITE MORE GUESTS.

"WELL, Philip, my boy," said Tom, slapping me on the knee when we were all in our seats, and I had relieved "Crœsus" of the reins, "I suppose it was an unpardonable piece of assurance for me to invite a man you had never seen without letting you know he was coming. And then to let him come up first! That was certainly rubbing it in, but the poor boy doesn't have a chance to get out much. Sort of a fresh air charity on your part."

He roared with laughter at this sally of his, and Hepburn smiled faintly.

"This poor boy has always had to do the society act, Philip, and he's fitted for better things. Hope you haven't any hops up at your house. Have you any hops?"

"Not a hop," said I.

"Nor a *cotillon?*"

"Nor a *cotillon*. In fact, I'm afraid it may be rather dull for one who is accustomed to do something all the time."

"I'm sure I'll have a delightful time," said Hepburn from the second seat. "I'm rather tired. It'll be a jolly good thing for me."

"By George, isn't this a paintable country?" broke in Tom. "If a man could only get the fragrance of this air into his pictures it would be no trouble to get rid of them."

"Inoculated already," laughed Ethel.

"Oh, I always get inoculated as soon as I come to this kind of country. I was born on prairie country and I never saw a hill until I was eighteen, and then I wondered how I had lived without 'em." He turned 'way round. "Pity you don't paint, Benedict."

Benedict, on the back seat, said, "Oh, I don't have to *do* anything to enjoy this. Just to be alive is enough in air like this. Isn't it, Alice?"

And Alice agreed with him and the horses bore us higher and higher, slower and slower, and at last we arrived and Ellery and Cherry greeted us.

James came out to relieve the guests of

their suit cases and I invited all hands to go to their rooms and remove the evidences of their smoky ride.

When Ethel and Madge had come down from our room I said to Ethel,

"No dressing, I suppose?"

"No, I suppose not," said she, and there was a little note of regret in her voice.

I went up and washed and put on a cutaway and in a few minutes I came down and walked back and forth on the veranda.

In about a quarter of an hour the three men who were using Ellery's chamber as a dressing room came down the front stairs. I caught a glimpse of them and lo, two were in Tuxedos, and Hepburn was in full evening clothes.

Quick as a wink, and before they saw me, I whisked around to the back of the house, and finding Ethel in the kitchen, where she was superintending some salad arrangement, I said,

"They're all dressed. Me to *my* evening clothes."

"Good," said she.

I saw Ellery within calling distance. He was in a sack coat. I hailed him and he came up.

"Don't want to make 'em feel foolish. They're all dressed. Run up and put on your Tuxedo or whatever you have. Come into my room to dress and we can help each other."

He got his clothes and we hastened to my room, where we made as quick changes as we could.

"Funny about Ethel," said I. "She likes simplicity, but she also likes evening clothes. Says a man looks better. I won't wear a Tuxedo and look like a bob-tailed cat, so I've got to go the whole thing. When she sees five immaculate shirt fronts she'll be just about happy."

"Well, it does look nice," said Ellery.

"Oh, I don't mind once I'm in them."

At last we were ready all but our ties, and none too soon, for we heard Ethel come into the front hall and say, "Dinner's ready. Where are the men?"

And then Madge said, "Oh, they had to run up stairs at the last minute to get something. Here they come."

Ethel called up to me, "Hurry down, dear. We'll go in informally."

"That's right. We'll be right down," said I.

We heard the tramp of the other three, and I would have run down on account of the stranger within my gates, but Ellery asked me to tie his cravat, and I made a botchy tie of it, and finally Ethel called up from the dining room. "We're all waiting, dear."

Then we both went down in our evening clothes, and entered the dining room. Around it stood the ladies and the three men, and when we saw them and they saw us a happy shout arose. The men were not in evening dress.

They *had* seen me when they first came down, and, as Tom explained afterward, Hepburn, seeing that I was not in evening clothes, had suggested that they all change back, which Tom was very glad to do, "as he hated the durned things."

So there they stood in sacks and cutaway and we were the only ones in evening dress.

"Well, I won't change back again," said

I, "but after this let's give our city clothes a rest and just be comfortable."

"But I contend," said Benedict, "that evening clothes *are* just as comfortable."

"Yes," said Tom, "but it's harder to get into 'em, and if we go out walking after dinner it's ridiculous to be dressed so stiffly in a wild flower country."

It was a jolly dinner and no one did more to make it jolly than Tom. His humour is elemental, but it is genuine, and his appreciation of it is also genuine and his tremendous reverberating laugh is infectious.

Many times during the progress of the meal I found Hepburn's placid eyes resting on Cherry.

"Two of them," thought I, and after dinner Ethel and I compared notes and we agreed that Cherry could have her choice.

Perhaps we jumped to conclusions, but to see Cherry was to love her, and Ethel told me that she was glad that Cherry was only a little girl when I first met her or "you might have been Mr. Paxton."

"Phil, do you know who it would do good to have up here?" said Tom, after a burst of enthusiasm concerning the country. "Jack Manton. Jack Manton and Billy Edson. They're both stone broke and they're getting their country by taking walks out of New York, and this scenery would just about kill 'em both dead. Why don't you ask 'em up?"

A roar followed this question.

"Let 'em sleep in the chimney," I suggested, at which innocent remark Minerva, who was waiting on table, gave a suppressed giggle that set Cherry off and she was followed first by Ellery and then—of all the people in the world, by Mr. Hepburn. Probably Minerva's act itself was so unheard of that it struck him as being humourous. A maid laughing at table.

But it was a lucky thing that Minerva was in the room. That is lucky for Jack and Billy.

"Kin I say sump'n?" said she to Ethel, and Ethel, rather astonished, said, "What is it?"

"They's a lot of boards out in the woodshed, an' James could build a place for those gen'lemen."

"The very thing," said Tom. "That's it. That's *IT*. Just ask 'em up and save their lives."

"But you said it would kill 'em dead to come up," said Cherry.

"Oh, they wouldn't stay dead five minutes in this air," said he. "Come on. If I hadn't been an artist I would have been a carpenter. Send for 'em. I'll help build the shack."

I looked at Minerva. Her face was beaming.

She loved company.

"What do you think, Ethel?"

"Why, the more the merrier," said she. "Are they congenial?"

"Congenial's no name for it," said Tom. "Both of 'em starving. Neither has sold a picture in six months, and the night before I came away they dropped in at my studio, and when I told 'em where I was coming they were as happy as if they were coming themselves, and were going to share in it. Two nice, promising boys, and perhaps this would be their salvation."

"Have them come by all means" said Ethel.

And Minerva went out to tell James the good news.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HOT NIGHT.

IT was a hot, clear moonlit night.

Our newly arrived guests, after an evening given up to piano music and song, had retired to their various cubby holes.

But peace did not lie upon the house, for it was the hottest night of the season and mosquitoes—hitherto an undreaded foe, attracted by the unwonted light and the music, had descended upon us and as, of course, screens were not dreamed of in a place where the mosquito rivals the tramp in scarceness, they had entered the house and were singing their infernal songs in the ears of people fresh from a mosquitoless city.

I was mortified. It seemed a breach of hospitality to invite people up to a place where every prospect pleases and man is not so vile, and then to let loose a horde of mosquitoes upon them.

It was between three and four in the morning, and soon the first signs of dawn would be upon us.

I was trying to be comfortable in a hammock slung under the boughs of the maple, and Ellery was trying to be comfortable in another hammock slung under other boughs, but neither of us was making a success of it, although he was fitfully sleeping. There is something unmistakably enticing in the thought of depending, cool and free from a leafy arbour while the summer moon watches over one's slumbers, and the lulling breezes croon one to unconsciousness, but loyal as I am to Clover Lodge and its vicinity, I am more loyal to truth, and that night was a night to be remembered for years even as the blizzard is remembered—but for opposite reasons.

The air was still, but the mosquitoes were not and neither were my guests. I could hear them stirring and slapping and I feared that some of them were cursing, and I longed for dawn with all my heart. Dawn and the hot day that would follow in its wake, for at least we could escape to some lofty point, where the mosquitoes would not follow us.

I knew that Tom and Benedict were used to all sorts of experiences, and I knew their wives too well to think for a moment that they would hold me responsible for the night and the winged pests, but Hepburn—

Hepburn had been raised in the lap of luxury, and when I thought of his tall form accommodating itself to the ornate but contracted sofa, I felt so uncomfortable that I thought of going in and asking him to swap couches with me—and change discomfort.

I fell into a doze, from which I was awakened by hearing a step on the gravelled path.

I was wide awake in an instant.

Between me and the moon was outlined the tall form of Hepburn, fully clothed and smoking a cigar.

"Is that you, Mr Hepburn?" said I.

"Yes," said he, softly, so as to awaken no one else. "Did I wake you? Pardon me."

"Oh, that's all right. But why are you up and dressed?"

"Why," said he, very glibly, "the night is so beautiful and bright that it seems a sin to sleep, don't you know. I thought I'd stroll about a bit."

My conscience smote me.

"It was that sofa, wasn't it?"

"Don't say a word. Sofa's awfully jolly, but I think I drank too much coffee."

"What's the matter?" said Ellery, waking up.

"What do you say to a swim?" said I.

"When?" said Ellery, sleepily.

"Why, now. How does it strike you, Mr. Hepburn?"

"Great."

Ellery, still half asleep, rubbed his eyes and then saw Hepburn for the first time.

"Why, is it as early as that?" said he.

"Earlier," said Hepburn, which was not so bad.

I had sat up in the hammock, and setting my feet in my slippers, I rose to my pajamaed height and said,

"This is the hottest ever. I'll get the other fellows and we'll go over to Marsh's Pond and have a swim at sunrise."

I tiptoed up to the hot box that contained

Tom and Benedict and whispered to them, "Are you awake?"

Tom answered, "Oh, no, we're sound asleep and dreaming of icebergs."

Then I could hear him shaking the bed with suppressed laughter.

"Well, come along for a swim. Get into your old clothes and don't make a noise."

In a few minutes we were all ready. We passed under Minerva's window, and although we stepped lightly we waked her and we heard her heavy feet coming down on the floor of her room.

I knew that a yawp was due, so I said in a voice loud enough to reach her, "Don't be frightened, Minerva. It isn't burglars. It's Mr. Vernon going for a walk."

"Lawdy, I thought it was more burglars," said she, and heaved a sigh of relief.

Other voices were now heard and from the window of the spare room was thrust the head of Madge, who demanded what was the trouble.

"Lack of sleep," said Tom. "We're going for a swim. Down to the old swimmin' hole, my dear."

"What won't men do?" said Madge, and retired to envy us our privileges.

"Might as well tell Ethel what we're doing. She may be worried," said I, and we walked under her window.

"Give 'em a song," said Benedict, who was a fine baritone, and he began it, " 'Sleep no more, ladies, sleep no more.' "

He sang it as a solo as none of us knew the setting he used, but as an injunction it was needless. The ladies were not calculating on sleeping any more.

"Where are you going?" asked Ethel from somewhere out of sight.

"Oh, only down to the old swimmin' hole," said Tom.

"Why, there's no swimming hole anywhere's near," said she.

"Marsh's Pond, my dear," said I. "This is a record-breaker for heat and we're going to break the record for swimming at an unseasonable hour. We'll be back for breakfast. Good night."

"How far is it?" asked Tom.

"Oh, only a couple of miles or so," said I. "We'll take it easy there and back."

"Please may I be excused," said Benedict. "I'm not in training for such a walk on an empty stomach."

"That's easily remedied. We'll fill up on cold lamb."

And we did fill up, and then we started, and in spite of the heat, we enjoyed the walk. It was after three and it would need the pencil of a poet and artist combined to tell of the wonders and the beauties of that walk with the delicate indications of the coming dawn filling the east with rosy promise.

Marsh's Pond is about two miles long and a half a mile wide, and it has at one point a sandy beach. Around it are cottages and bathing houses, most of them bearing the idyllic names that lake dwellers love to bestow upon their houses. We passed "The Inglenook" and "The Ingleside" and "Inglewild," and "Tramp's Rest," and many another bearing equally felicitous titles, and at last we came to the sandy beach just as the sun cast its first golden beams on the foliage of the woods across the lake.

"Hepburn, you're a brick for waking up so early," said Tom. "If only I had thought to bring along my little flask. It's just the thing before a morning swim."

"If you don't mind Scotch," said Hepburn, producing a cunning little silver flask.

Ellery was on the water wagon, but the rest of us drank to the rising sun and then plunged in and were cool.

"It was worth the walk," said Benedict, as he dove and emerged twenty feet beyond. "Why don't people do this every day?"

With the sun had come a gentle breeze that was several degrees cooler than the surrounding atmosphere had been, and we spent a pleasant half hour admiring the coming of day from our watery vantage.

After we had come out we went into the bathing house, which went by the name of Tramp's Rest. It was a roomy affair, and had been left open all winter, or we would have been unable to enter it.

"We'll put up a shack like that," said Tom, "and Jack and Billy can bunk in it."

"I'm afraid we haven't lumber enough," said I.

When we were ready to go home Hepburn and Ellery said they were going back by what is called the upper road, which is a half mile farther, but we chose the lower road, and were home a good half hour ahead of them.

It was after six and we were ravenous. A west wind was blowing and it had blown the crazy horde of mosquitoes away, and it was much cooler, and I am thankful to say that not again that summer did we have such a visitation. Mosquitoes might always be found in the long grass, but it was easy to avoid them.

Minerva prepared an early breakfast, and just as we sat down to it Ellery and Hepburn arrived.

"How do you like it as far as you've got, Talcott?" asked Tom, as we all sat down.

"Well, do you know I read this 'Simple Life,' that the President recommended, and I didn't see such an awful lot in it, but if this is it, it's all right. I don't think I ever had such an appetite for breakfast before."

"After being awake all night you ought to have," said I, in an apologetic tone. "You see the Wheelocks had two young children and they did not entertain and as we took the house furnished we were not prepared as we should have been."

"But it's nice to have the house full all the time," said Ethel, who evidently thought my remark ungracious.

"No question of its having been filled last night," said Tom, rubbing his cheek, "Filled with mosquitoes. I thought they never came up here."

"You might say they never do. Last night was an exception," said I.

"Dear, dear, how like Jersey that sounds. Jersey nights are made up of exceptions," said Tom.

Minerva appeared at the door, not with her hand raised, but in an attitude that said "Please, may I speak," and Ethel, with a hasty look at Hepburn, said, "What is it, Minerva?"

"Now James wanted to know where's he's to build that lean to."

"The what?" said Ethel.

"That's all right," said Tom, grasping the situation. "You tell James to wait until after breakfast and I'll come out and show him."

Minerva shut the door and Tom said, "She believes in free speech."

"I must speak to her," said Ethel.

But there was a general chorus of objections, Hepburn expressing his opinion by saying, "It strikes me as awfully quaint, you know."

After breakfast Tom took me aside and said,

"Now, see here, Phil, this deluge wasn't expected by you, but I don't see any indication of the waters subsiding. We all want to stay. Now hospitality is hospitality, but we're not paupers and we're not rich enough to feel that we can live on you all summer without a murmur. You understand? Now, I've forced Billy and Jack on you, and I've been talking with Hepburn and Benedict, and we're going to form a pool to cover expenses. Don't want you to make a cent out of us, but we don't want you to be out of pocket, and so if you'll let us pay our share of the bills when they come in we'll stay. Otherwise we all go back to-morrow. Yes, sir, we all go back to-morrow. I'm in earnest."

Tom was a curious mixture of simplicity

and worldly wisdom, and I could not help laughing at him.

"Well, go home," said I, "and leave us to ourselves."

He put his arm around my shoulder.

"Now, you don't mean that at all, old man. You were both glad to see us and you want us to stay. Hepburn's having the time of his life."

"With his midnight walks?"

"That's all right. It was part of the fun. Now, I'm going to see about getting some cot beds because Hepburn is too long for that sofa. Where can I get a wagon?"

I told him about Bert, and he went on to see James about the lean to.

Later I met Hepburn. He came up as if he wanted to speak about something that was weighing on his mind, and I expected to have him tell me that he had just received a telegram calling him home at once, but I was mistaken.

"It's no end jolly up here," said he, "but I can see that we're a good deal of a household for Mrs. Vernon. She doesn't look strong. Now, isn't there some place near by where we could arrange to stay, don't you know, and come over here for tennis and all that sort of thing? I'd like to come up again."

"Why, you're not going?"

"Why, I really ought to, you know. So unexpected my coming and all that sort of thing."

Ethel had heard us talking and she came out of the house.

"We don't want you to think of going, Mr. Hepburn, if you can be comfortable. I'll be able to borrow a bed to-night and if Mr. Warden builds that temporary shed, in such weather as this you'll be comfortable sort of camping out."

"Oh, I'm all right. The mosquitoes were a bit annoying, but everything else is all right. I'm feeling very fit this morning, I assure you."

"Then don't think of going," said I.

And then Cherry came out with the tennis net and Hepburn relieved her of it immediately and went with her to put it up, and Ellery and Mrs. Benedict came out a minute later and announced that they were going for a little walk.

Ethel, with a suggestive glance at me, that seemed to imply that all was not right between Cherry and Ellery, went into the house to invite "Jack" and "Billy," while I went down to James's house to see about engaging James's little sister to help Minerva. If we were going to be a hotel we would need more help.

As I passed the woodshed I saw Tom in his shirt sleeves sawing planks, while Benedict and James were acting as willing helpers.

The only one who was doing nothing was Madge, so I hunted her up and invited her to go with me to the house of James.

And thus continued the day begun so early in the morning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TRAMP'S REST."

TOM had discontinued work on the lean-to for some untold reason, and just after lunch he and Hepburn had gone over to Bert's to get the horse and go for the cots.

The rest of us broke up into convenient groups and tennised or walked, but by the middle of the afternoon a drowsiness came over us, superinduced by our sleepless night, and with the exception of Ethel and Mrs. Benedict, who were helping prepare dinner, we all slept, some in hammocks, one on the ornate sofa and the rest in the three bedrooms.

And then, just before dinner, Tom and Hepburn not having come, we all went out to look for them.

It ought not to have taken them long to

buy two cot beds and bring them up, and they had been gone four hours at least.

We walked upwards of a mile toward town, and at last came to a rock, from the top of which we could command a view of the rest of the road to Egerton, but there was no sign of Bert's wagon.

"Well," said Ethel, "we'd better be starting back, for dinner ought to be ready soon."

And so we sauntered back, expecting every minute to be overtaken by the cot bringers.

We arrived at the house and all entered by the south door, attracted thereto by the recumbent figures of our truants. Each one was reclining gracefully upon a cot reading, and smoking excellent cigars.

"Here, here," said Tom, when he saw us. "This will never do. Dinner's ready this ten minutes, and Hepburn and I are starving."

As soon as Hepburn had seen us he had risen from his couch, but Tom continued to lie there blocking the doorway.

"What about that lean-to," said I.

Tom rose and folded up his cot as an Arab is supposed to fold his tent. Then he set it up against the side of the house and said oracularly:

"The lean-to is indefinitely postponed. We know *more* than we did this morning."

"Well, but where have you been? We walked half way to town and didn't see you," said Ethel.

"Exploring the country. Haven't we, Talcott."

"It's a beautiful country," said Talcott, laughing.

All through dinner those two seemed to have a secret, and as near as we could make out, Minerva was in it, because every time she came into the room and looked at Tom she smothered chuckles.

After dinner Tom said, "Mrs. Vernon, what do you say to our taking our coffee in the summer house?"

"In the summer house," said Ethel, "why, there isn't any summer house."

"Well, whatever you call it, then. Minerva, you bring it to us there."

Minerva broke out into childlike laughter. "All right, sir, I will."

Then she looked at her mistress and said, "Kin I do it, ma'am."

Ethel shook her head at Tom and said,

"You're a bad boy. All this is subversive of discipline." But she told Minerva to do as Mr. Warden wished, and, Tom leading the way, we all went out of the house feeling that we were on the verge of a surprise.

Out the front door and north of the house we went and then around to the lesser orchard at the back of it and there, between two apple trees, stood a "summer house," over the dilapidated door of which was a sign reading "Tramp's Rest."

We who had bathed that morning recognized in it the bath house in which we had dressed.

"How did you get that here?" said several of us at once.

"If you don't mind having it on your land," said Hepburn, "I'd like to make you a present of it. I took a fancy to it this morning and this afternoon Tom and I drove over there on our way from town and brought it back."

"Yes, but who said you could take it?" said Benedict.

"Oh, I bought it this morning. Mr. Sibthorp and I found out the owner and he was willing to sell it for a song."

"But how did you get it here on that wagon?"

"Oh, we didn't. We had this—er—Bert's horses—but an Irishman of the name of Casey loaned us his hay wagon and he felt insulted when I offered to pay him for the use of it. He really became violently abusive, don't you know, and used highly colored language, but we could see that he meant well. Really I thought him something of a character. Didn't you think him a character, Mr. Sibthorp?"

"He certainly was," said Sibthorp. "He had no opinion at all of Bert's horses. Said he had an—ould—ould—"

"Ould scut," I suggested.

"That's it. Said he had an ould scut of a horse that would walk right away from Bert's pair, and that any time we wanted to take the young ladies out for a ride to come and take him right out of the stall, whether *he* was there or not. His language was ornamented with picturesque oaths that wouldn't sound well here, but they were awfully funny."

"I guess he said nothing that he wouldn't say before anyone," said Ethel.

Sibthorp gave her a whimsical look. "Excuse me," said he, "but I guess that when *you've* heard him talk he has repressed his vocabulary."

"Why," said Ethel, "you know he came with berries the morning after you came."

"Oh," said Ellery, "he had sworn off that morning. You ought to have heard him today."

"Perfectly willing to let it go at imagining," said Ethel.

And then Minerva came out with the lilting walk that was hers when she was happy. She bore a tray and set it down on a rustic table that I remembered to have seen in the furniture store at Egerton the week before.

"Here's to the 'Tramp's Rest,' " said Tom when we had all been provided with coffee. "I boney a cot in this house to-night. You fellows can sleep in rooms if you want. For me the stars through the cracks."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MINERVA AND THE SNAKE.

THE latter part of the week Ethel received a letter from Billy, saying that he and Jack would be delighted to come up.

Billy's letter was characteristic. It ran:

"My Dear Mrs. Vernon:

"You are a kind, good lady. Jack agrees with me in this. You have saved our lives. It has been a long time since we sold any pictures, and we have forgotten the address of our bank, so we were not thinking of going to any summer resort this summer, but your invitation could not be refused without insulting you.

"It is not entirely as if we were strangers, however, because we know Tom (oh, don't we know him) and we know your husband. Tom has brought him to the Olla Podrida Club more than once and has made him smoke the club cigars which we thought unkind. So we have a certain sympathy with your husband and are prepared to like him better the more we know him.

"Will you please ask Tom to tell us what train to take, and also to do any other things that are necessary. He will understand.

"Please give my regards to Miss Paxton. You mentioned her as part of your 'party,' and she must be a large part, unless she has changed. I used to know her before I came to New York, when she was a little girl (three years ago).

"Jack wants me to tell you that whatever *I* think of you he thinks also, and that you do not know how much you have done for ART IN AMERICA by making it possible for us to set down on canvas the beauties of your state. (I'm not sure whether that should be a capital S or not.)

"Yours cordially,

"William Edson."

When we showed the letter to Tom and asked him what Mr. Edson meant by saying, "ask Tom to do any other things that are necessary," he burst into a roar of laughter.

"That means in plain English that the dear boys are stone broke, and that they will need money before they can buy their tickets. I will telegraph them ten dollars."

"Do you mean to say," said Benedict, "that those young men are going to borrow the money to come up here?"

"Yes, why not?" said Tom with just a suspicion of heat in his tone.

"Why, nothing," said Benedict, "only I'd stay in the city all summer before I'd borrow money to go away. I'd be too independent."

"Independent, poppycock," said Tom. "We're told to let independence be our boast, but we're also told that it's wrong to boast. So it's wrong to boast of independence. No man can be independent in this world. He relies on one man to bring him into the world and on another to bury him, and all the time he's here he's relying on one person or another. The only thing is for him to accept help and be willing *to* help. That's all," Tom laughed. "Sermon's over. Collection will now be taken up to bring those two babes to the place where they can make bread for next winter. No, sir. You, Phil, can *not* contribute. This hard-as-nails Benedict, who thinks he's made his own way, and who has been helped all along by our free institutions, will chip in, and so will old Crœsus when he comes back from his horse-back ride with Cherry." He paused. "Sibthorp ought to learn to ride."

Benedict's hand went down into his pocket and brought out a bill.

"Now, see here," said Tom. "I don't want you to have the idea that you're doing a charitable act, for you're not. Those boys are going to give us a couple of sketches before they go back, and we'll sell them for more than ten dollars and refund pro rata. Will that satisfy your sordid business soul?"

Benedict drew off and gave Tom a friendly punch. They were always insulting each other, having been friends for years, and both of them members of the Olla Podrida Club, which, by the way, is an association of artists and men interested in art. Benedict buys a picture once in a while and, according to Tom, when he relies on the advice of an artist friend, he gets a good one. When he relies on his own judgment he gets something that provides no end of amusement to all the artists except the one who painted the picture.

"I want none of your impudence, Tom," said he, and then Minerva interrupted.

It seems as if Minerva were always interrupting and generally with a shriek.

"Oh, Lawdy! Lawdy! there's a big worm in the kitchen!" cried she as she came running out of the sitting room to where we were standing.

"Worms can't hurt you, Minerva," said Tom. "Go get a bird and see him catch the worm."

"Oh, my! but this worm would eat any bird I ever saw. It's that long."

She showed how long it was, and Tom said,

"Why, it must be a snake."

We men ran into the kitchen, and there, sure enough, was a little green snake about a foot long and frightened in every inch.

Tom picked up the mop, and carefully aiming at the little creature, he brought it down about three feet away from it. For the snake had eluded him.

Minerva's curiosity was greater than her fear, and she came to the door of the kitchen to watch us.

Benedict picked up a broom and made a

swipe at the snake that upset a pitcher of milk, but missed the snake which coiled its pretty green length in the middle of the floor raised its pretty head and darted out a needle-like and beautifully red tongue at us in a way that reminded me of the Morse alphabet.

I cannot explain why I was thus reminded, and probably such a reminder was far from the snake's intention.

I could not help feeling sorry for the little fellow. They say that snakes love milk. Here was a place flowing with milk, but he could not stop to drink it because three huge beings threatened his very life.

"Can he jump?" said Minerva, preparing to jump herself.

"No, Minerva, he is perfectly harmless," said I, resolved to save his life. "Say, you fellows, stop whacking at him and capture him alive. I want to show Minerva that these snakes haven't a vicious thought in their heads."

I took the mop from Tom, and watching my chance, I brought it down on the snake in such a way as to pin it, wriggling. Then I picked it up by the neck.

"Oh, Lawdy!" cried Minerva, and stepping backward trod on the tail of Miss Pussy who happened to be coming into the kitchen.

Miss Pussy emitted a yell that Minerva firmly believed to come from the mouth of the snake, and clapping both her hands to her ears she rushed through the dining room and met Ethel coming in.

Ethel and she met on their foreheads, and Minerva was not hurt at all. Ethel, however, was hard hit, and, infected with Minerva's panic, she turned and ran through the sitting room into the arms of Madge, who had come to see what was happening.

Madge was almost bowled over, but managed to withstand the shock, and brought the chain of concussions to an end.

I am perhaps a crank on the subject of snakes, but I do object to the senseless panic that seizes on some people when they see one. Now, if it were a mouse, it would be different. A mouse has cluttering little feet and a method of approach that reminds one of happenings in a previous state of existence, and I confess that a mouse in a room will spoil my peace of mind, but a snake is generally good to look upon, and it is graceful beyond measure, and it is nearly always harmless and perfectly willing to leave you most of the world for your inheritance.

So I kept hold of the snake, and after Ethel had assured me that she was not seriously hurt by the impact of Minerva's splendidly built skull, I told her that I wanted to give Minerva a little lesson in natural history.

There is one thing about Minerva. She is a reasonable being. Her fear of cows vanished after we had assured her that cows were for the most part friendly, and as there were no rattle-snakes in the vicinity, I knew I was safe in calming her fears in regard to the snake. So I asked her and the rest to come out of doors and I would show her what a perfectly innocuous thing our little green friend was.

"Nearly everything we meet out doors, Minerva," said I, "is disposed to leave us alone if we will leave it alone. This little green snake, that looks as if it were fresh from Ireland, is only anxious now to get away from me and rejoin its little ones. If you kept the kitchen full of snakes there would never be any flies there, because snakes love flies. Come and stroke him. I give you my word he will neither sting nor bite.''

Minerva came up with confidence, and amid shrieks from all the women she patted the little green head, and the little red tongue came out and spelled a message of love to her.

''See there, Minerva! He wants to show you that he is perfectly friendly.''

''My, aint he clean!''

''Of course he's clean. Snakes are all the while washing themselves with their tongues.'' I caught Ethel's eye, and felt that my natural history was shaky, but I wanted to make an interesting story for Minerva, and who cares for facts in natural history, so long as you have something that will be read?

''I dare say that at one time snakes and cats belonged to the same family. When you see a cat crouched down and creeping along after a bird, it looks like a snake. Its head is flattened and its ears are laid back and its tail looks just like a snake in itself. Probably snakes once had fur—"

"And they rubbed it all off creepin' 'round."

"Exactly. Now, take this little snake and be kind to him and overcome your antipathy to him—"

As I said this I loosened my hold on him, preparatory to handing him to Minerva.

But instead of going to Minerva, he turned and made his way swiftly up my arm and around my neck.

Ugh. I never felt anything so creepy in my life. I flung him from me (with a wild cry, Ethel says, although I think she is mistaken). At any rate I tossed the snake far from me, and he made his sinuous, chilly, gliding, repulsive way to his waiting family. And probably wrote a book on the bad habits of human beings from his short and superficial observation of them.

There is a certain rooted antipathy to snakes that lies deep at the base of our being. I cannot explain it, but I know it's there. I am no snake charmer.

Minerva might have said something, but

she knew her place, and refrained. She merely went out to the kitchen and guffawed all by herself, while I, ignoring the remarks of my friends, went upstairs to wash the feeling of cold snake from my neck.

CHAPTER XXX.

A HORSEHEAD PERCH.

I ENJOY the luxury of being absent-minded sometimes. I claim that to be absent-minded once in a while proves that one has a mind to be absent.

I was absent-minded the day that Jack and Billy were expected and I went over to the lake to fish for bass with Sibthorp, with never a thought of them.

The rest of my guests went their various ways and left the house to Ethel and Minerva, and about an hour before train time Ethel realized that I had done nothing about getting the expected arrivals.

"Can you drive a horse, Minerva?" said she.

"I kin sit in the wagon and hold the reins."

"Well, I guess that's all that's necessary, but I can't even do that. You'll have to take me down to get the men who are expected."

"Yas'm."

"We must go at once and get Mr. Casey's horse."

I must explain that Ethel knew that "th' ould scut" had had the blind staggers the day before and that Pat had explained that he could not have two attacks the same week, as the blood letting simply rejuvenated him.

So the two set off for Pat's and found him unhitching his horse.

"Oh, have you just been to town?" said Ethel (as she told me afterwards).

"Sure I have. Can I git y'annything there?"

"Why, I wanted to meet two friends who are coming up. If I'd known you were going down—"

"I'd have waited arl night fer them. Annything to oblige a leddy. Take him though, you. He's gentle as a kitten. Gentler, because I've not spared 'im. He'll not have the blind staggers. I bled him like a pig yestiddy, an' he's fresh as the morning."

As he talked he harnessed him up again

and invited the two to get in and he'd turn him around and start them right.

"What'll I do if anything happens, Mr. Casey?"

"Sit on his head and holler fer help."

"Oh, of course," said Ethel. "I read that in a book."

Minerva went off in an ecstacy of laughter.

"What are you laughing at, Minerva?" asked Ethel.

"I was wonderin' how you'd get up to his head."

"Why, Mr. Casey means if he falls down. Don't you, Mr. Casey?"

"'Deed an' I do. But he won't fall down. He's strarng as a horse an' gentle as a—as a litter of kittens. He knows it's a leddy behind him, an' he'll have plisant thoughts of you arl the way down. But don't use the whip. After bleedin' he's a bit skitterful."

We had had the horse several times at a pinch and Ethel knew that he always cautioned against use of the whip, although th'ould scut's hide was as tough as that famous one "found in the pit where the tanner died."

"You take the reins, Minerva," said Ethel.

Minerva took them and pulled them up so tight that she almost yanked the horse into the wagon.

"Oh, he'll never stumble. A loose rein an' a kind worrd an' th' whip in the socket an'll he go like the breezes of Ballinasloe. Good bye an' God bless you."

And so they started and the horse went along in a leisurely manner as was his wont. Once he strayed off to the roadside to crop the verdant mead and as Minerva pulled on the wrong rein she nearly upset the wagon. But she was quick to learn, and before they had gone a mile Ethel said she drove as if she had been doing it all day.

They found that the horse had the pleasing habit of picking up apples that lay in the road—for their way ran by several apple-trees, and there were windfalls in plenty. As he was not checked, every time this happened Ethel felt as if they were going to be pitched out head foremost, but they made their first mile in safety and then the horse, reaching a level stretch "got a gait on him" and trotted along in good shape for nearly half a mile.

When they came to the place called "long hill" Ethel got out so that the horse would have less difficulty in making the descent.

Minerva, innocent as a child as to the proper thing to do, did not tighten the check rein nor did she take in the slack in the reins, but resting her hands idly in her lap chirruped to the horse as she had heard James do, and he began the "perilous descent."

Half way down he saw a bit of hay in the road, and being of a mind to eat it, he lowered his head at the very moment that he stepped on a loose stone, and the next minute Minerva was over the dashboard, and the horse and she lay in the road together.

She was the first one to pick herself up. In fact she was the only one to do it, as Ethel was several rods away and almost too frightened to stir.

"Quick, Mis. Vernon, come and sit on his head."

Ethel told me that she did not like the idea at all, but it was a case that called for but one decision. The horse had been loaned to her and if she could save its life by sitting on its head she meant to do it, although she did hope that Minerva would relieve her from time to time.

"I thought we'd divide it up into watches," she told me, "and I did hope that some wood team would come along soon."

The horse struggled to rise, but as the hill was steep he found it hard to do and in a minute my wife had seated herself as elegantly as she could on his head, and probably smoothed her skirts over her shoe tops after the manner of womankind.

Minerva, her spirits ebullient as soon as she saw that no damage had been done, went off into a roar of laughter at the quaint spectacle of Ethel using a horse as a sort of couch.

"I wonder if it hurts him?" said Ethel.

"'Deed no. You ain't heavy enough."

"Well, if I get tired I'll want you to come."

"Lawdy, I'd smash him. He won't need me."

"Is anyone coming?"

"No'm."

"Well, isn't this too vexing? There are those two men coming."

"Where?" said Minerva, looking up and down the road.

"No, I mean on the train. Of course they can hire a team, but it is awfully vexing to have this happen."

"Yas'm. Shall I get you a napple?"

Without waiting for an answer Minerva climbed a rail fence—not without difficulty—and picked up several red astrachans that lay just beyond it. Then she essayed to return, but this time she got caught when half way over and could not extricate herself.

"Mis. Vernon, I'm stuck. Somep'n caught my dress. Come an' help me."

"Oh! *Dear!* I can't help you. I can't leave this horse for a minute. There's no telling what might happen. Isn't this awful?"

"'Deed it is. Never did think much of that ould scut. What is an ould scut, Mis. Vernon?"

"Oh, it's just a pet name. Irish people are very affectionate."

"Never get *my* affections," said Minerva, race prejudice cropping out even in her predicament.

All the while she was trying to free herself, and at last she tore herself loose, sacrificing a part of her skirt, and rolled over the fence, the apples scattering in front of her as if in a panic.

But once over she gathered them up and handed one to Ethel, who leaned back along the forehead of her animal sofa and gave herself up to the delights of eating.

"Would the ould scut like one too?" asked Minerva.

"Oh, surely," said Ethel, and so Minerva picked out a large apple and held it to the velvet nose of the poor old horse. He smelt it eagerly and opening his jaws took it in.

Minerva sat down in the grass of the roadside and fell to, herself, and for a minute, Ethel said, the three jaws crunched apple pulp noisily.

"Mis. Vernon?"

"What is it, Minerva?"

"How come a horse can eat when he's standin' up. Lyin' the way he is now it's easy because the apple kin go along level, but when he's standin' up how can it go way up in his head."

"Why, he swallows it."

"Yes, but how can he swallow up? We swallow down. If I was to stand awn my head I couldn't swallow."

She was silent a minute and then she said, "Go'n' to try."

And try she did.

There in the lonely road, with Ethel reclining so luxuriously on a horse-hair sofa, Minerva played circus and made a croquet wicket of herself and then tried to eat an apple.

Ethel was so interested in the experiment that she was surprised when she heard a masculine voice say, "Well, I swan!"

She turned, and there below her in the road stood the figure of the Perkins' hired man.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," said Ethel from her perch. "What's the proper thing to do to this horse?"

"Well, I'd git off his head first off."

Ethel left her seat, the hired man took hold of the bridle, the horse made one or two tries and then rose to his feet and Ethel said he

She made a croquet wicket of herself.

shook himself so violently that she thought the harness would break.

But it stayed together in all its knotted parts and Minerva, somewhat shamefaced at having been caught trying to swallow like a horse, climbed up into the wagon and my wife drove on down-town, where she arrived just as Jack and Billy were about concluding a dicker with a hackman.

When they saw th' ould scut they concluded the dicker—Ethel having introduced herself, and then they insisted that she ride up with them, while Minerva followed after with the grips.

Sibthorp and I and no fish arrived home simultaneously with my guests.

The meeting of Billy and Cherry was most affecting. They acted like school children over each other. It struck me at the time how much more a woman will palaver over a man if she does not care for him in any other than a Platonic way than she will when her affections are engaged.

It is also queer how some men express themselves more fully in their letters than they do in their actions.

Billy was much quieter than Tom, and Jack was almost reserved.

But the same air that has a lazing effect on writers braces up artists to do good work. Tom had painted two landscapes since his arrival and Billy and Jack went out after supper and each took a shy at the same sunset.

It was curious to see how different were the colors each used.

And the sun had used another palette altogether. And yet all three sunsets were beautiful and I dare say that one was as true as the other, all of them being illusions.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY.

IT may not possess any interest to the reader, but I feel that we have been together so long (if he has not skipped) that he *will* be interested to know that early in September an editor in New York wrote me, saying that he would take a long story of mine at such a figure that—well, our summer outing was more than paid for and on receipt of the check I stopped keeping a hotel and insisted on my "guests" becoming guests—a distinction with a wide difference.

Golden rod was yellowing the lanes and fields and roads, and here and there purple asters were foretelling the approach of winter. The nights were getting chilly and providing an excellent excuse for pine knot wood fires, around which we all gathered and told stories or listened to Cherry's piano music or to heated but amicable art discussions on the part of the three brushmen.

Two goal points beckoned us to the future; one of them the centennial anniversary of good old Mrs. Hartlett, the other the cattle show at Oakham.

The former would fall on September 16th; the latter on October 3rd, and the day after the cattle show our happy household would break up. We expected to go down with the rest and open up our flat and we regretted the necessity of doing so, as the time approached.

We had grown to love the country in all its moods and I felt sure that in winter also we would find it full of the stimulus of life, but even with James for a companion, we knew that Minerva would not outstay the first snow storm, and since his situation with the liveryman now only awaited my announcement and his acceptance of it, we were going to count the winter in New York as simply so many days of anticipation of the next summer's joys with perhaps the same crowd of congenial people, and it might be two of them keeping house in a new bungalow.

After all, Hepburn was better fitted than Sibthorp to make a husband for Cherry. She was a girl with luxurious tastes and the very fact that she could live our simple life and be happy argued that she would make an ideal helpmate for the man who had been born with a diamond encrusted spoon in his mouth.

Mrs. Warden thought that Billy also was smitten, but if so Cherry did not know it.

The centenary of Mrs. Hartlett fell on a perfect day. The morning broke, cool and cloudless and a brisk west wind policed the air all day and kept it free from disorderly elements.

At three o'clock we all went over to her house on foot. Sibthorp and the artists had ransacked a greenhouse at Egerton and were loaded down with roses: Hepburn had been fortunate enough to buy a century plant in bloom and the rest of us bore other offerings.

On the little lawn in front of her house sat Mrs. Hartlett on a stiff-backed chair that had belonged to her grandfather. She was alert and smiling and actually rosy. Her hundred year old eyes sparkled with animation and she was just as proud of having achieved a century as any wheelman ever was.

There were at the lowest estimate two hundred people gathered on the lawn about the old lady, and I'll venture to say that not five of them were there out of idle curiosity. There were Minerva and James and the president of the Egerton National Bank, and the pastors of three churches of different protestant denominations and a comparatively newly arrived Hungarian family, to whom Mrs. Hartlett had been "neighbourly," and Father Hogan and the Guernseas and the man whose pipe I had returned. (He had brought Mrs. Hartlett a peach pit basket, which he had whittled himself and which gave her great joy, as she said it was exactly like one that her brother had given her in 1812).

But to go back to the guests. Such a heterogeneous collection of people one does not often see, and yet they all had one common object; to render homage to a woman who, for a century, had breathed a spirit of kindliness and tolerance that was American in the best sense. Yankee farmer, Hungarian immigrant, Pat Casey—who was there, alert and smiling—all were the better for Mrs. Hartlett's having lived so long a life, and each one felt it in his own way.

And almost every one present had brought a gift. In some instances they were trifling affairs—like the peach pit basket—but the kindly spirit of giving was there, and I doubt not that Mrs. Hartlett valued the little carving for the sake of the associations it brought up full as well as she did the handsome antique chair that the Guernseas gave her.

One of the last arrivals was a man who had walked many miles to visit her on her birthday. He drew after him a toy express wagon.

He was patriarchal in appearance, with a long white beard and eyes more shrewd than kindly, and yet it was a kindly spirit that had drawn him ten miles out of his accustomed itinerary that he might pay his respects to the woman who had never bought a single one of his wares, but who had always given him a pleasant salutation and had more than once invited him to come in and partake of berries and milk, or, if it was wintertime, to have a cup of coffee and fortify himself against the elements.

It was Isidor Pohalski, an old man about thirty years Mrs. Hartlett's junior, a peddler by occupation, who in summer drew his wares around the country on a little express wagon and in winter drew them on a boy's sled. (So they told me.)

He had brought a present too, a bertha of Belgian lace, and when I saw him and Father Hogan and Rev. Mr. Hughson and the bank president and the artists so near together it gave me a kind of lion and lamb feeling that smacked of the millennium.

"Do you mean it for me?" asked Mrs. Hartlett, recognising the beautiful lace.

Isidor nodded, saying nothing. His English was for but one at a time. In a crowd he was reduced to signs.

"Much thanks. Much thanks," said Mrs. Hartlett, quaintly, being one of those who talk to a foreigner with special idioms. She held out her hand and shook his and said,

"You stay for lemonade? Yes?"

The Hebrew nodded and smiled and stayed.

There was one surprise connected with the very informal exercises of the afternoon and that was the gift by Mrs. Hughson on behalf of the people generally of a rouleau made up of one hundred gold dollars.

"May your pathway to heaven be paved wid 'em," said the irrepressible Pat, stepping up and shaking hands with her.

"Thank you, sir," said she, and Pat walked off with his head in the air and brimming over with good feeling—and suppressed oaths.

"Won't you sing your song, Mrs. Hartlett?" asked Cherry.

"I'm afraid I'm not in very good voice today," said the old lady with an exaggerated simper and then she hastened to say, "That's what people used to say when I was a girl. There was much more singing then than there is now, but it was always considered right to apologise for one's voice."

She cleared her throat and then she turned to the doctor, who sat near her, and said, "I wanted to dance, to-day, but Dr. Ludlow says that at my age the less I dance the better for my health—and I dare say he is right."

She looked at the doctor, her eyes twinkling, and then she sang a strange old song that I had never heard before. It was sung to a quaint air that might have been by Purcell and that told of what befell the daughters of a king who lived up in the "North countree:"

" 'The king lived up in the North Countree
  " 'Bow down downaday
" 'The king lived up in the North Countree
  " 'The bough that bends to me
" 'The king lived up in the North Countree
" 'And he had daughters, one, two three—
" 'I'll prove true to my love,
  " 'If my love proves true to me.' "

It was a melodramatic song and told of the death by drowning of the youngest of the three daughters, and the phraseology was so queer that it might easily have become comic; but the old lady sang it with such simplicity; her voice, in spite of its quavers, was so true and still bore such evidence of the silvery quality that it had once contained, that my three artist friends afterwards acknowledged that the song gave them a choky feeling in the throat.

Sibthorp told them that one did not need to be an artist to have choky feelings.

At the song's conclusion Pat Casey turned to the Rev. Mr. Hughson, by whose side he was standing, and said,

"She's a dam good woman—glory be to God."

Cherry had made some sort of lace arrangement for the hair, three cornered and arabesque, and when Mrs. Hartlett had finished singing she crowned her with it.

It wasn't particularly becoming, but when I said so Ethel said I was horrid.

Just after the singing I saw Minerva whisper something to James, and the two went off. At the time I supposed that she had gotten tired of standing around among white folks, with nothing to do, and in a measure I had guessed right, but I was not prepared for what followed.

The windows of Mrs. Hartlett's parlour were open; it had been her intention to hold her reception in the house until she saw that it would be impossible with such an out-pouring of neighbours and friends.

Suddenly from out the open windows came the sound of melodious voices—negro voices singing one of the most plaintive of the darkey melodies: "Steal Away to Jesus."

Our proposed concert at Egerton had fallen through, owing to various reasons. We had made it all right with Deacon Fotherby by sending him the goodly amount of a collection taken up one evening among the Clover Lodgers.

But when I heard the music and recognized that there were four voices concerned in it I realized that the concert had merely been changed in point of time and place and that we were now listening to it, and that it was one of Minerva's sudden inspirations. She had come to Mrs. Hartlett's with no gift and the generous-hearted girl had proposed that she and James and the others give the only thing in their power to give.

The effect was strangely beautiful. The voices were softened just a little; they were in perfect accord and the four sang with the sincerity of feeling that negroes always throw into their songs, whether grave or gay.

"It's Minerva's present to you, dear," said Cherry, leaning over and patting Mrs. Hartlett's hand.

"Niggers can *sing,* annyway," was Pat's Irish comment.

I think everyone present felt that he or she had some part in the concert. It was what they all would have done if they had been able, and as we listened to song after song, some "spirituals," some full of laughter, and saw the rapt expression on the face of Mrs. Hartlett, we felt that the "century" was being crowned felicitously through the happy idea of an ignorant girl, whose heart was in the right place.

The thing that made Minerva a joy forever was that her heart *was* in the right place.

Perhaps that is why James had found it so easily.

* * * * * * * *

When we went home at sunset from the old lady's house Cherry walked by her oldtime playmate, Billy, and it struck me that he might be thinking of becoming a rival to Sibthorp and Hepburn.

"It's cruel in Cherry to let that young man walk with her," said I to Ethel.

"Oh, I don't believe that he has ever thought of Cherry except as an old friend," said she.

"Well, if Cherry lets him walk with her much he will begin to think Cherry is catching."

"But she's already caught," said Ethel.

And we could hear Hepburn at that very moment singing a little thing that Cherry was very fond of playing.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WE GO TO THE FAIR.

"HOW are we going over to the fair at Oakham?" asked Cherry, the evening before that event.

"I've provided for it," said I.

"Not th' ould scut?" said Ethel.

"Hardly. Let's see, there are ten of us."

"Twelve," said Ethel, "or thirteen."

"No, ten."

"Twelve. Minerva and James are going and we're to have lunch over there."

"Five buggies, two in each," said Sibthorp as unconsciously as he could.

"Fine," said Hepburn and Billy in the same breath, and Cherry blushed rose red.

"Couldn't get buggies, but I think you'll all be pleased at the conveyance," said I. "It'll be quite a ride. Three hours there and three hours back."

"Goodness," said Cherry; "I thought it was only about seven miles away."

"It might be 200 miles away if we took a special," said Sibthorp suggestively.

"And only a few rods if we took snails," said Tom and laughed uproariously.

"It's something between snails and specials," said I, but further than that I was sphynxlike.

Next morning was a crisp, smoke scented October morning, the air full of the snap of early fall, the landscape hinting at coming crimsons and yellows, the sky a clear blue, guiltless of clouds.

We rose early and while we were at breakfast we heard the lowing of cattle.

"Whose cow's loose this morning?" asked Tom.

"That's the voice of our steeds, if I'm not mistaken. Get your wraps and traps and come."

Scowls of surprise were bent on me by all.

"Behold the chariot of Apollo and the horses thereof," said I, and led the way to the front door, whither I was followed by all.

In front of the house stood a comfortable looking hay wagon carpeted with straw and hitched to it were twelve oxen.

They were of all sorts and sizes, from a pair of huge white blanketed ones to two little black Holstein leaders; they were mottled, brown, mahogany and fawn color and the black Holsteins had gold leafed horns in honor of the occasion. At the side of this "string" stood Sam Goodman and his son.

"Are we going in that?"

"That we are going in," said I proudly. "If we have luck we'll get there inside of three hours. How far is it, Mr. Goodman?"

"Between six an' seven miles. What d'yer think of the string? Prize winners?"

"They ought to be."

"What does he do with so many cows?" said Cherry.

"Where—*where* did you come from, baby dear?" said Tom. "Those are called oxen in this part of the country. Not all yours are they?" turning to Sam.

"No, sir. Mine are the white blankets. But all Egerton cattle and we've taken fust prize for four years hand runnin'! Whoapp, Jerry! Whenever you're ready I'm ready, Mr. Vernon."

Which was local for "Please hurry up," so I told our party to get aboard as soon as possible and we would start for the cattle show.

There is no better way of enjoying scenery than to go out riding behind a team of cattle. One has all the slowness obtainable by walking and yet one is riding, and can give his full attention to the beauties of either side of the road. To those who are not in too great a hurry I commend this form of locomotion!

At last we were ready, and after we were all seated James helped the giggling Minerva to a seat in the back. She and James were the only ones who had real seats. The rest of us sat in the straw.

"G'long!" shouted Mr. Goodman, and the oxen started.

"Isn't this fun?" said Cherry, wriggling her shoulders with delight.

"Fine, and after three hours of it walking will be even more fun," said Tom.

"Oh, I've forgotten the lunch," said Ethel.

"Now, look here," said Tom, "we mustn't stop this procession. Give me the key, Philip, and I'll go back after the lunch and—"

"Whoa," shouted Mr. Goodman.

"Don't stop," cried Tom. "I've only got to go back to the house. I'll catch up. Keep 'em going."

"Whoohaw, gee a little," shouted Goodman, snapping his long whip and the oxen kept up their sleepy pace, while Tom ran back to the house to get the lunch.

"Isn't this lovely?" said Cherry. "Whenever we get tired of riding we can walk on ahead and wait for the team to catch up. Why haven't we ever done this before?"

"Because it would be something of a task to get six pair of cattle on any day except fair day," I explained. "And, by the way, this costs us nothing. Goodman is honoured at having us come. Said so—in other words. Was insulted when I spoke of payment."

"I'm learning something new about the country people all the time," said Cherry.

"Goodman sells cheeses. He doesn't rent cattle. If we had wanted a cheese it would have cost us market prices, but a ride after the Egerton string honours him and Egerton. That's the Yankee of it."

"Isn't it glorious? Where is Mr. Warden? He'll surely get left."

Just then an automobile going to the fair came up behind us and passed us tooting the loudest horn I ever heard.

The cattle were not broken to automobiles and the leaders started to run, their example was followed all along the line, and in a minute (and to the secret gratification of Goodman, who had not liked Tom's cavalier way of going back as if we were stationary) the six pair of cattle were running away.

The wagon bumped and pitched and we were pitched and bumped amid shrieks from Minerva and laughter from the rest.

"Whoo! Whoo, I say! Gee—haw! *Whoo!* WHOA! WHOA-UP!"

We had reached the brow of a little hill, at the base of which a pretty brook meanders across the road, and the frightened animals plunged down the hill regardless of their reputation for slowness.

As we left the brow of the hill we saw at the house Tom waving the lunch basket and calling to us to stop. He thought it was a trick, but we knew it wasn't.

We beckoned him to come and then we gripped the sides of the wagon and wondered just how it would end.

At the side of the bridge the road led into a by path to the water and the wise Goodman, fearing that we would not keep the bridge at the rate we were going gee-ed them into the by path.

Whether the water had a cooling effect on them or what was the reason, I cannot say, but just as the wagon was in mid stream the forward oxen stopped, their example was passed down the line as it is on a freight train, and the series of jolts was finally communicated to the wagon and James and Minerva turned back summersaults into the water.

We all choked with laughter when they emerged, dripping.

"Don't like cow ridin'," said Minerva, shaking mud and water from her hat.

They were not hurt and by the advice of Ethel, Minerva went back to the house to get dry clothing. James waited to show her a short cut across the fields, so that we need not wait, and Tom came up with the lunch basket just as the cavalcade started again.

"Sorry I didn't bring a wheel along," said Tom. "If we find we've forgotten anything else it'll be hard catching up. There's quite some go in those beasts."

"Them pesky devil wagons," said Goodman. "I wish there was a law agin' them."

It is not my intention to tell of all the things that happened on the way. The oxen got accustomed to automobiles long before we reached Oakham and our progress became slower and slower as we had to take to the side of the road to let pass us the constantly thickening stream of vehicles of all kinds from every part of the county bound for the fair. Arrived at the grounds, wherever pretty Cherry went the boys were sure to go, while we elders went off by ourselves.

Ethel and I had hardly had a minute together since our guests had begun coming, but Ethel seemed to have thrived on the extra work and the added excitement. Of course it was the unlimited fresh air that had made it possible. We looked back on a very happy summer and were glad that everything had happened as it had.

"I wonder if Cherry has made up her mind yet," said Ethel, while we were watching the efforts of a man to hit a darkey's head with a base ball.

"She'll have to make it up quickly unless she wants Hepburn and Sibthorp to possess their souls in patience during the fall."

"And whichever of the two she takes there will be two disappointed men."

"What, Billy?"

"Yes, I think, after all, he is hard hit."

"And she treats him with amusing indifference. There they all go to have their tintypes takes. What children they are!"

It may have been a half hour later that Ethel and I were watching the energetic seller of whips.

Starting with one whip, which he offered for a dollar, and getting no takers at that price (for most of them had seen his operations before) he would offer two and then three and then four and at last half a dozen whips for the same dollar.

"'An' I'll throw in this raw-hide just to make the game excitin'. Here, by George, I'm ashamed of myself to be such a poor business man as to give away fifteen dollars' worth of whips for the price of one decent one, but I'm bound to make a sale if I give you my *whole stock* for a dollar. He-ere we have a bobby dasher of a whip to tickle the flies to death in the pantry. I'll chuck that in just for devilment and I hope you won't tell none of your folks what a fool I be. That's eight whips for one ordinary every day dollar. Why it's a crime to take advantage of me in this way and git so much for so little.

"'*Thank* you, sir, for relievin' me of an embarrassin' situation."

This to a long-bearded man who handed up a dollar and got the eight whips, one of which would have cost a dollar in any harness store. But that is not the same as saying that it would have been worth a dollar.

"Now, here we are again. Here's a whip for one dollar."

Naturally the zest of the transaction had departed with the long bearded farmer and most of the crowd went away. But new ones came up and minute by minute the whip man added whip after whip and soon the crowd was as dense as before and he strenuously showed the swishing qualities of each whip, fanning the air with vigor and filling that part of the fair grounds with his syren voice and his picturesque language.

"Oh, you're here, are you," said a voice at my side, and turning I saw Sibthorp.

"Hello, where's Cherry?" said I.

"I wanted to speak to you. Let's get away from that clatter."

I believe that Ethel must have divined what he wanted to say, for she said,

"Take me over to the wagon. I want to see about getting lunch ready."

We took her over to the wagon and on our way there corralled James and Minerva. Ethel had brought an oil stove for the making of coffee and the three began operations at once, while Sibthorp and I walked off to that part of the fair where the cattle tests were to be made later in the day.

I could see that whatever it was that Sibthorp wanted to say he was not going to find it easy to say it, for he made five or six false and utterly inconsequent starts and seemed ill at ease.

"Say, Ellery, you didn't get me off here to tell me that you never saw such long horns on an ox. What do you care about oxen?"

"No, that's so—er—say, Phil, the fact is, I believe that I am—that I think a good deal—"

"That you are in love with Cherry?"

"Why, how did you know it?" said Ellery, with a sigh of relief.

"Oh, when you've been through the mill yourself you're always able to tell the symptoms. Now what can I do for you? Do you want me to propose?"

"No, no-o, but I want to know whether you think I'd stand any sort of show."

"Why, my dear boy," said I. "Aren't you as good as anybody else on earth? Have you totally misconceived Emerson's message? Go in and win. Cherry's a good girl—as good as anybody in the world. You're a good chap—good as anybody on earth. Tell her your life story, and then come to me for my congratulations."

"Well, but do you think I stand any show?"

"You're the best judge of that, old man. She's been very kind to you. I'd feel encouraged if I were you. But do it to-day, and do it soon. There are several Richmonds in the field."

"That's what I was afraid of. Jack and the rest."

"Jack, nothing. The only man *you* have need to fear is that genial millionaire, Hepburn."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him. Cherry doesn't believe in marrying for money."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, we talked it over academically, you know."

"Well, sometimes a woman forgets to be academic when it comes to the test. I think you'd better engage her in talk, old man, and do it to-day. Remember we all go down to-morrow."

"Thanks, awfully, old man. You've heartened me up considerably."

We had walked as we talked over to the wheel of fortune, and just as we arrived there a young man was so remarkably lucky as to win a hundred dollars. He was a very lucky young man, because earlier in the day I had passed by there with Ethel and had stopped a minute and he had then won fifty dollars. I like to see such happiness as was his. I have never seen it anywhere else, but on the stage. He put the money in his pocket and started away from the wheel and the gentleman who was running the wheel asked him in honey tones if he wouldn't stay and try his luck again.

"*No,* sir," said the upright young man. "I never did anything of this kind before today, and I'm going to stop now."

"I wish I had your strength of character," said the owner of the wheel, who seemed to be a very straightforward sort of person, even if he was limited in his phraseology. I recalled that he had said exactly the same words to the same young man when he had won the fifty dollars in the morning, and had signified his intention of stopping for good.

"Hello, there's Cherry, now," said Sibthorp, and looking up I saw her going by in company with Tom and his wife. Sibthorp joined the trio and he and Cherry fell behind and a minute later I saw them stop at the gate of the merry-go-round. For, of course, a modern country fair would not be the real thing if it did not have one of the gaudily grotesque nerve rackers.

Wishing the boy luck, I wandered off alone and soon fell in with Hepburn.

"Hello, Mr. Vernon," said he. "Have you seen anything of Miss Paxton?"

"Yes, she and Sibthorp went off together not a minute ago."

"Oh, that's all right then. I was afraid she had gone off with Billy."

The young men had one evening drunk "*Bruderschaft*" and all called each other by their first names.

"Why are you afraid of Billy?" said I.

Hepburn colored, an unusual thing for him to do, as he generally had easy command of himself. He looked me straight in the eye and then he said,

"I'm hard hit, governor."

"Does you credit," said I.

"Yeah," said he, pulling at his under lip. "But you know it's deuced hard for a fellow like *me* to say anything. All that cursed money of mine, you know. I've never been taken for what I am myself until I came up here, and when it comes to telling Miss Paxton how things stand with me, don't you know—why, I wouldn't blame her if she refused me, even if she loved me, because a girl like that doesn't like to be thought—doesn't like to be thought to be influenced by the money a fellow has."

"Well, she wouldn't be."

"No, that isn't the point. *She* wouldn't be, but she might be afraid that the world would think she was."

We were walking back and forth along the "Midway," and we had now come to the wheel of fortune and subconsciously I felt impelled to stop and look in at the operations which had just started up with the placing of a dollar by a raw-boned fellow fresh from the plough.

"You mean to say," said I, "that if you were in the position of Sibthorp, for instance, that you would feel you had a good chance of winning her?"

"I don't think Sibthorp has any chance

with her. I mean that if I was ordinarily well off I would go in and ask her, and I think she'd have me. I'd tell you what I wouldn't say to any one else up here, for I think you understand those things. I'm not conceited but—well, a fellow knows."

"Lost it, young man," said the man at the wheel, "but next time you may have better luck. *You* want to try?"

"Why, I believe I will."

Interested as I was in Hepburn's revelations of soul, I looked up and saw the young man who had been so lucky twice before. He had plainly forgotten that he had ever seen the wheel—so treacherous are some memories—and pulling out of his pocket a dollar bill and a cent—all he had, evidently—he placed the dollar on "25," which with great ingenuousness he said was his age, and the wheel spun round.

"I'm afraid you're going to lose it, young man," said the gamester. "It's a hundred dollars if it stops at your figure. She comes nearer, she passes, she comes round again—she goes slower—she pas—no, she touches it. I congratulate you, young man. I lose, but you gain and I like to see a man win when he's young and out for fun."

"By *George,*" said the young man, ecstatically happy. "I never played one of the blamed things before. A hundred dollars?"

"Yes, a hundred dollars. Suppose you try it again."

A dense crowd was now around the wheel and all eyes were fixed on the poor young man, who had so suddenly won a pocket of money—and that for the third time that day—although I was the only one who remembered that fact.

His hand sought his pocket—and then he remembered that a dollar and a cent had been all he had had—there—and he shook his head and said,

"No, sir. I've struck ile and I'm go'n' to quit."

"By George, I like your strength of character. Who else will take the young man's chance? Only a dollar a try."

The dollars rained down. The wheel went round and a score of anxious eyes blazed at the board. But every man lost his dollar and the young man who had been so strangely lucky and so curiously forgetful of his former luck, walked away, followed by Hepburn, who had been in a brown study, and me.

"There's only one man seems to win in those games of chance," said I.

"Some men are born lucky," said Hepburn, and straightened unconsciously as he said it.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHERRY DISPOSES.

WE had had a merry lunch, we had watched the tests of the draught cattle, we had all drunk pink lemonade and survived, and now, by unanimous vote, we had decided to stay and have our dinner in the "Mammoth Restaurant," and go home by the light of the golden hunter's moon.

The wheel of fortune had been dismantled and the man who ran it and the man who had been so lucky had gone off together. They seemed to have struck up a friendship, and I am told that it not unfrequently happens that lucky men and professional gamblers make the rounds of the various county fairs and the luck of both continues until the end of the season.

Sibthorp was not the life of the party at lunch, but Hepburn was in high spirits.

I judged that Sibthorp had been tried and found wanting and that Hepburn had been accounted worthy. Jack and Billy were their usual irresponsible selves and Tom bubbled over with a merriment that was at times elephantine but always genuine.

After lunch Sibthorp came to me and we strolled away naturally and easily. I put on my best father confessor air and waited for him to unbosom himself.

"It's all over," said he.

"What? You've asked her?"

"Yes."

He looked so dejected that I grasped his hand.

"Maybe a cattle show was a poor place," said I.

"I chose a poorer," said he, "I asked her in the merry-go-round."

"Wha-at?"

"Yes. I didn't want to be romantic. It has often struck me that many a girl says yes because it is moonlight, or the lane is shady, or the breeze is balmy. You see I look at it from the point of view of a writer—and I thought I'd strip it of all glamour after I'd made up my mind—thanks to you—that I had a chance, and so when she said she'd like to ride around on the elephant I was fool enough to sit alongside of her on a blame little donkey and there wasn't anybody within ear shot as the next thing behind was a wagon and they're not popular. And just before the thing started I—well I asked her, and she burst out laughing and then she got mad and then the old thing started and we had to ride till it stopped, and then she asked me to take her away because she felt dizzy and I took her away and we ran plump into Hepburn and he asked her to go and see a man selling whips, and I went down the road a mile and wished I'd never been born. I think she felt insulted."

I looked the other way.

"Why don't you try again?"

"Thank you. I know when I've had enough."

He left me and I went behind a large oak and sat on the grass and laughed until I cried. The idea of a sensible man sitting on a wooden donkey and asking a pretty girl on a wooden elephant if she would care to ride the merry-go-round of life with him.

"I'm afraid that Ellery is artificial," said Ethel when I told her.

"But Hepburn is the real thing," said I.

It was in the middle of the afternoon that Ethel and I were sitting together in a little pine grove. I had been telling her the events of the morning and now we were resting on the grass and watching the farmer folk. Oakham fair day is the great day for exchanging "visits." Two elderly men met.

"Well, how are you doin' it?"

"Oh, the way I always do. You're lookin' abaout the same. Leetle more gray but I guess you're able to do the chores?"

"Oh, yes, ain't had to call in Maria to do that yet. You seem to be stavin' off death."

"Fooled him so fur. Git me in the end though. That your daughter?"

"No, that's my grandchild."

"Well, well. Looks like your daughter Libby."

"Libby's daughter."

"By Godfrey, time *has* a way of gittin' along. Beats these automobiles."

"Doos so. Well, glad I seen yer. Oakham Fair's gre't day to see folks. Most interestin' exhibit. I say folks is the most interestin' exhibit."

"Ye-es, yes. Be'n comin' here thirty-five years. Ever sence the fust fair."

"Me too. Bet ye a cooky you won't do it no thirty-five years more. Not 'nless the good Lord fergits to git ye."

"Ha, ha, ha. Well, good bye, Silas. 'Member me to the folks."

"I will so. Like's not you'll find 'em 'raound here sum'er's. Be good."

"Same to you y'old rascal."

The two men shook hands and passed on and then we heard the end of a conversation on the other side of the tree—a conversation that was being carried on while two walked together.

"No, Mr. Edson, a woman always feels honoured and I hope we may always be friends."

Ethel looked at me and her lips parted. It was Cherry's voice. We waited to hear Hepburn speak but he did not do so.

The steps died away and Ethel rose to her feet and looked down the pathway.

Cherry was walking toward the edge of the pine woods and by her side walked a young man in whom the animation of youth seemed to be temporarily arrested.

He had not spoken a word in our hearing but we knew from the shape of his back that it was Jack.

"Three proposals in one day," said Ethel in awed tones.

"Well, she's worth it," said I, and was a little astonished that Ethel did not second my assertion.

"Isn't that Pat Casey walking with a priest?" asked Ethel suddenly.

"Yes, that's Father Hogan and Rev. Mr. Hughson told me he was one of the greatest influences for good in Egerton."

"I wonder if he will stop Pat from using profanity."

"Maybe he won't try to."

Just then Pat left the priest, touching his cap as he did so, and a moment later he saw us and hurried over with the light little step peculiar to him, lifting his shocking bad hat as he came.

"Hello, Pat," said I. "So you are considered a good enough man to walk with Father Hogan?"

His eyes twinkled.

"Sure it's honoured I am by walkin' wid him. He's a hell of a fine man. I was just tellin' him so. Didn't he walk a mile out of his way yisterday to tell me he seen me ould cow I lost, roamin' toward Maltby. First he told them to pen it up, an' thin he come an' told me. He's dam sure of Heaven, that man is! No airs on him at all an' him a friend of Archbishop Ireland."

"Well, Pat, how's the ould scut. Did you enter her for the race?"

"Sure I did not. She got at the oats last night an' was feelin' so fine this marnin' that I knew't'd be a sure t'hing if I entered her."

He winked his eye at Ethel and then he said:

"An' how's the cherry blossom?"

"Pat, you're a poet. She's still on the branch."

"Egorry, it's the lucky man that picks her. A fine gerrul. None better in Ireland an' that's sayin' arl there is to be said. I suppose ye'll be go'n' down one of those fine days now."

"Yes, we expect to go to-morrow."

"Is it so soon an' the glory of the year so nair. Sure it's sorry I'll be to see the lights arl gone when I'm passin' by in the avenin'.

He took off his hat and extended a very dirty hand to Ethel.

She took it bravely and he said,

"If y'ave need of th'ould scut come an' take her an' welkim. An' come up next yair. Give me regards to the young leddy. I'd a darter just like her wance."

We smiled involuntarily as we contrasted Cherry and Pat.

"I'd a darter just like her, but she got consumpted an' she's wid the saints. She was a hell of a good gerrul."

His eyes moistened and I understood for the first time what had made him the good-hearted man he was.

With a wave of his hand he walked lightly away.

"And yet some people don't like the Irish," said Ethel.

We all attended the races but they did not merit a description. They were almost as tame as a hippodrome race at a circus, and I verily believe that th'ould scut would have stood some show of winning had Pat entered him.

Cherry sat next to Ethel on the grandstand and to me she looked distraught. She had little to say and I, with my usual habit of adding two to two, made up my mind that she had accepted Hepburn and was now sorry that she had done so. I could not account for her lack of animation in any other way.

I suggested my thoughts to Ethel but she said they were nonsensical; that Cherry was very sorry to have to leave the place; that she had become attached to Clover Lodge and that she hated the thought of going up to her aunt at Bar Harbor.

She recovered her spirits in the "Mammoth Restaurant." The long tables were so unlike anything to which she had been accustomed that the very novelty pleased her, and as we were all together at one end we were able to do and say pretty much what we wanted and we were a gay crowd.

We had met pretty nearly everybody we

had ever seen in the Egertons, and we had bid good-bye to old Mrs. Hartlett just before the races began.

She having a mind to try a new sensation and one that would have been impossible in her childhood, had come over with her physician in his electric run-about and it was something of a shock to see the dainty little old lady accustomed to move slowly and with dignity perched up in one of the fastest things on wheels, but it was just such open-mindedness that had enabled her to remain young for one hundred years and we bade her good bye quite sure that she at least would be in Egerton another summer whoever else might drop by the way.

Minerva was in her element all day long. A crowd was a crowd after all even if it was composed of country people, and she kept herself and James in the thick of it.

Once we saw her treating six strange little darkey boys and girls to pink lemonade and once I saw her by a happy fluke throw a left-handed ball at the colored man who was soliciting tries at his hard head and she hit him fair and square and then hit the crowd by her hearty, carefree laughter.

There was one little incident connected with Minerva's day at the fair that might have been serious if Minerva's star had not been in the ascendant when she herself was.

A balloon ascension had been advertised for the afternoon and Ethel had wanted to go over and see it, but I told her that the filling of balloons by gas was always a slow process and that we'd see it when it went up.

Now, James was more gallant, and when Minerva asked him to take her to see the balloon go up he took her to the very spot.

It so happened that when the balloon was filled and they were ready to cast off the guy ropes and go up to the extent of the long rope Minerva took it into her sportive head to catch hold of the rope and the next minute the balloon went up with the stout Minerva dangling beneath.

Three things went up—no, four. The balloon, Minerva, a shriek, and a shout—the latter from the crowd.

Ethel and I had been in the main tent looking at the horticultural display, but at the familiar shriek we ran out.

They had stopped the ascent of the balloon but they flew Minerva full a hundred feet above the crowd, one foot around the rope, the other frantically kicking.

It was not an adventure that could have happened to anyone but Minerva or if it had happened to any other person he would have fallen to earth and cast a gloom over the fair.

But somehow the crowd seemed to realize that it was a time for mirth and that the girl would come down all right and they howled advice at her. Some told her to climb into the car, a physical impossibility for her, while others asked her to do tricks, supposing that she was an acrobat in disguise. In fact I think it was the general opinion that she was an acrobat.

Poor Minerva an acrobat. Far from it.

"Oh, James, come an' git me. I'll die up here. Oh, Lawdy, why'd I come up?"

Minerva was unconsciously quoting her own utterance of a few weeks before. Why had she come up, indeed. Was it to end her days in the clouds?

Much can happen in a little space of time and although there was a good deal of give and take on the part of Minerva and the crowd I don't suppose she was up in the air many seconds. We can afford to laugh at it now but at the time, aside from its ludicrous aspect there was a terrifying side to it. Minerva was not built to fly to mother earth from such a height and survive.

But although she was frightened half to death she did not lose her grip, and her foot around the rope lessened the strain on her hands and James and several others sprang to the rope and began to haul her down as soon as they could.

When she felt her feet touch earth she fell on her face in a dead faint and then the crowd learned for the first time that she was not an attraction of the fair.

A dash of lemonade—the nearest approach to water handy—brought her to her senses, but her feelings were hurt and she would not listen to James's apologies (although what he found to apologize for I don't know, seeing he had not been to blame; but he was very gallant)—she would not listen to his apologies but flounced off to a place far from the madding crowd just as Miss Pussy had retired after the humiliation of her upward trip and for the space of full five minutes Minerva refused to be comforted.

But peanuts have a mollifying effect on some dispositions and James bought a bulging bag and presented them to the amateur *ascenseur* and all went merry as a marriage bell from that time on.

* * * * * *

It was moonlight when the slow-moving oxen, decorated with their prize-ribbons (for they had won first prize) took up the homeward march.

We had a free road in a very short time for everything else passed us, and we sang songs and yodled and tried to forget that tomorrow would end all the happy days.

Coming to a steep hill we all got out, although Mr. Goodman said there was no need. But sitting Turk fashion is easier for Turks than for Americans, and we felt the need of limbering up.

The ascent was flanked on either side by luxuriant maples that made a tunnel through which flecks of moonlight dappled the road. When we had gone half way up the moon seemed perched on the apex of the hill, golden and radiant, and while Ethel and I looked two figures walked into the shining circle—two figures that were very loverlike.

It was impossible to miss the significance. Cherry and Hepburn.

Their heads were facing each other and they were two black silhouettes representing happiness.

I looked at poor Sibthorp who was walking just ahead of us. He, too, had seen the silhouette as it was outlined for one brief moment against the golden background, and I knew that his thoughts were not happy. I knew that Jack and Billy were somewhere behind us and a minute later Tom and his wife took the place of the lovers, but there was room for an ox team between them. And yet Tom and his wife are happy. But after twenty years silhouettes against the moon are not loverlike, however loverlike may be the hearts that are beating ten feet apart.

That night, after all had retired, Ethel stood before the glass taking out her hairpins and she addressed my figure in the mirror.

"What *do* you suppose?" said she in a low voice.

"I suppose I'm tired," said I yawning.

"Cherry is engaged."

"Tell me something new," said I. "Where are they going to live."

"In his studio—"

"What," I almost shouted. "Is it Jack after all."

"No, goosie," said she fondly. "It is Billy."

"And the moon?—"

"That was Billy and not Hepburn. I was fooled too."

"But Billy hasn't a cent."

"No, but she has faith in his future, and she says she has never loved any one else since she first knew him, years ago."

"Ethel Vernon," said I. "As a character reader I am not a success. I would have sworn that it lay between Hepburn and Sibthorp."

"You must remember that Cherry is not a

character in one of your stories but a real girl,'' said Ethel.

''Well, I wish her joy of her long wait.''

''It won't be as long a wait as it would be if she had rejected him,'' was Ethel's Hibernian response.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MINERVA SETTLES IT.

AT almost the last moment we all postponed our going down for a day as there were so many last things to do in the way of leaving the place winter-proof.

And it was well for us that we waited, for the very last mail altered the complexion of things considerably. It contained a letter from the Wheelocks telling us that instead of coming home they had decided to stay in Rome for another year.

"I thought I'd write to say," it ran, "that if you want to rent the house again next summer we'll be glad to have you do so. Let me know if any repairs are needed."

I sought out our guests and told them the good news.

"We can have the place next summer and we invite you all to come up again and be with us, or build bungalows, if you want."

Cherry blushed furiously. " We might form an artist colony."

"Suits me down to the ground," said Billy.

Hepburn said nothing. Neither did Sibthorp, but Tom and his wife said that they had been thinking seriously of building a little cottage, and now that we were sure to come back he would surely do it.

"I must go and tell Minerva," said Ethel. "Do you know she is positively blue this morning at the thought of going back. She'll be glad to know we are coming up next year."

She went to the kitchen and through the door which she left open we heard what followed.

"Minerva, I have some good news to tell you."

"Yas'm."

"The Wheelocks are not coming back for a year and we'll take the house again next summer, so you can come up with us and see more of your friends up here."

Minerva laughed a joyous laugh, and James, who had been nailing fast the kitchen windows, added volume to her laugh in a cachinnation that was brimming over with optimism.

"Mrs. Vernon," said he, dropping his hammer on the floor. "Minervy wanted me to tell you something that she thought might disappoint you." He laughed again, this time in a conscious way. "Fact is," said he, "Minervy an' me has come to an understandin', an', an'—an'—we're go'n' to git married."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Ethel, quickly, "and I don't mind saying that I've been hoping for it. Mr. Vernon is quite sure he can get something for you to do in the city."

"Nothin' in the city would just suit me, ma'am," said he, "I wasn' cut out for the city. I once passed a couple of days in New York' and it was all I wanted. Too noisy."

"Oh, you'd git used to that," said Minerva. "*My*-oh-my, that's what I like about the city. Ef 'twas noisier here I'd like it a heap better."

"Can't you postpone your marriage till

next summer, James? We can't get along without Minerva, and we're coming back here next summer and you could get married then and we'd employ you and probably run a kitchen garden for you to attend to. You see there'll be a number coming up next summer."

"I dare say I could do that all right next summer but I got a job at the Boardman's tendin' to their green house for the winter, an' Minerva an' me's go'n' to git married just as soon as you leave. She ain't go'n' down at all."

Ethel saw it was no use to plead; that Minerva and James were so selfish that they had rather marry and stay up than postpone their marriage the best part of a year in order to enable her to keep a good cook. She left the kitchen and came to me with the news which I had already heard, as I told her.

The rest of the party condoled with her.

"Isn't it disheartening," said she, sinking into a big arm chair disconsolately.

A brilliant thought struck me as I looked at my wife.

"I have a solution of the whole business."

I stepped to the door. "James, stop that hammering a minute."

James, who had resumed his task of nailing fast the sashes, stopped.

I returned again to Ethel.

"I think that I can work on that novel that Scribman wants just as well here as in the city. What do you say to our staying up here all winter so as to keep Minerva?"

"Oh, you treasure of an idea-haver," said Ethel, rushing at me and kissing me right before everybody.

"But would James let her work?" said Cherry.

"That remains to be seen," said I. "Let's see it now."

We all trooped out into the kitchen, Mr. and Mrs. Tom, the Benedicts, Jack and Billy, Sibthorp and Hepburn and Cherry by herself. She had avoided Billy all the morning but as he had told me the news I knew it was all right with them.

As we entered the kitchen James was walking toward the north window and Minerva was walking toward the south. Both of them were looking very unconcerned. If I had been making a picture of it I should have called it "After the Salute."

"James," said I, "I congratulate you on the news that Mrs. Vernon has just brought me, although we'll hate to give Minerva up. In fact we want to know whether if we decided to stay here all winter you could not attend to the Boardman green house and let Minerva do our cooking? You could live here, you know."

James' handsome face became occupied with a smile of great dimensions.

"I reckon I could do that, all right, sir. What do you say, Minervy?"

Minerva simpered. "I'd like nothin' better than to work for you all winter up here. I was thinkin' it would be awful lonesome after you left." James looked as if he thought this only half a compliment but Ethel felt it was a very sincere one.

"Oh, you dear good thing," said my wife, and I was reminded of the day that Minerva promised to go up to the hated country.

"James," said I, "there'll be no need to postpone your wedding day."

Minerva giggled.

James looked me in the eye. Then he picked up the hammer and going over to the window he drew out the nails he had just driven in. They would not be needed now that we were going to stay.

"Mr. Vernon," said he, " 'member that day we went to Springfiel'?"

Minerva giggled harder, sunk her head in her shoulders, and put her hand before her face.

"Yes, I remember," said I, wondering what was coming.

"Well, we got married that day."

"Is that so, Minerva?" said Ethel.

"Yas'm," said Minerva.

MAR 8 - 1954